

JULY 1980

SIC VOS NON VOBIS

by ALEXANDER HARRISON

SUMMARY

Great institutions, like the lives of great men, are usually well recorded. Yet there are many lesser institutions that have played their part in the national life, and are worthy of some record. If their functions are not documented, future generations may only know them in the guise of some distorted myth or legend, or as a brief notice in some publication.

Sic Vos Non Vobis. The motto of the now defunct Dean Foresters School. 'Thus for others, not for ourselves' would seem to be a reasonable translation. What better motto could there be for anyone engaged in such a long-term venture as forestry. So the student was advised at the outset of his training that he was to plant and care for trees for posterity, not for himself.

The school was founded in 1904 when the Forest of Dean was administered by the Office of Woods; with the intention of giving some theoretical training in woods management to workmen who had the potential for promotion. It was non-residential, and meant in effect that recruits would be "likely lads" from the Dean. When the Forestry Commission took over the functions of the Office of Woods in 1920, it was realized that an expansion of training would be necessary, and the school became residential.

The course was for two years, with a yearly exodus of qualified men and an intake of new students every September. This meant that there was a senior and junior year, with instruction graded accordingly. The first year was mostly spent in practical forest operations and in the second year greater emphasis was put on theoretical subjects.

Seniors would normally work together, but would be detached at times to take charge of juniors, and so acquire some insight into the responsibilities of supervision. According to the forecasts for future staff requirements on the Commission, intake of students could vary, but 20 in residence would seem to have been normal. In the years of which I have personal knowledge, 1936-37 and 1937-38 the figures were 39 and 36 respectively, numbers which strained the accommodation to its limits.

Juniors had few illusions about the capabilities of seniors; they lived in too close contact. But the seniors seniors, who had left the school were already the stuff of legend. Who could fell or thin or plant or weed like these giants? Surely they were of the breed that would not be seen again, if juniors believed their seniors. Was it not one of these heroes who for a bet of 10 cigarettes and to relieve the tedium of digging the fallow in Nagshead nursery, swallowed a live grub of *Melolontha vulgaris*?

There was no entrance examination. I think that most men obtained a place, as I did, through the recommendation of their district officer. Our intake was a little unusual, both terms of numbers and abilities. Certain unkind critics were of the opinion that with us the Commission had scraped the bottom of the barrel. Certainly we were a mixed lot. Whilst

some had gone into the woods straight from school, quite a few of us had had varied employment in the difficult times of the early '30s, and were on the way to becoming "Jacks of all trades".

One of the rules of entry was that all men had to be bachelors. I did not know for some years later that one of our company was married, and concealed the fact until after he had completed the course. Some cynic once said that all rules are made to be broken. In the effete days following World War II, married men were accepted; and so soft had the regime become that there was even a matron on the staff!

The teaching staff consisted of a district officer and forester, both of whom had duties apart from the school. The district officer was the principal lecturer on silviculture, the forester instructed in practical woods operations and surveying. He also slept on the premises and was responsible for discipline and the organization of the working parties. He was assisted by two of the seniors, the school foreman and the outside foreman. The former was mainly engaged in administration, the latter was concerned with the juniors work programme. The only other staff were a male cook and cleaner. The absence of any females on the premises gave the establishment a somewhat monastic quality. We took a certain pride in this monasticism, and it was not the done thing to invite any female friend or relative on to the premises; in fact I think I am right in stating that it was forbidden by authority.

The egg is nothing without the shell. The building was a converted factory, and looked it! A four storey rectangular structure, the epitome of a solid Victorian industrial establishment. I have a photograph showing it on the occasion of the coronation of King George VI. Not even the Virginia creeper that half covered it, nor the embellishment of G V I R in the national colours could disguise its stark functionalism. There were no dreaming spires or shady cloisters for us.

The ground floor contained the forester's bedroom, situated like the guard room of some mediaeval keep, adjacent to the front entrance. The rest of the floor space was taken up by an office, bathroom, drying room, kitchen, and dining room.

The three storeys above were dormitories, lower, middle and upper respectively, were all connected to a stone staircase, which also gave access to the lecture room and games room. The games furniture consisted of a billiard and table tennis tables, benches and an elderly wireless set.

Because of the pressure of our numbers on the limited space of the games room, a common room was built on some spare ground at the rear of the main block, and it was thought to be useful instruction if selected students made the furniture, which was to consist of Morris chairs, log boxes, and a refectory table. Nominally the work was under the supervision of the Dean's head carpenter, who told us that the oak planking we worked had been felled in 1920 with the intention of converting it to flooring in the Commission's head office, but it had not been used. When we planed and chiseled at it, it had been air seasoning for 16 years. I can vouch for its toughness. I am glad to say that the refectory table has been preserved and is in the Commission office at Coleford.

By tradition the seniors had the upper dorm, with the exception that two of them were detailed to sleep in the junior dorms, presumably to set an example of orderly decorum! I do not know on what basis this selection was made, but I had this duty in my senior year. New intake selected whatever bed was vacant on arrival, and as I had selected a bed near a window at the end of the middle dorm, I was able to occupy this place for the full two years. Each man had an open ended cubicle, with a bed and small chest of drawers. There was no sick bay of any kind. Fortunately we were a pretty hardy lot, but in the event of any illness being longer than a few days, the sufferer would be sent to the local hospital.

There was an interesting procedure in the event of fire. The lower dorm had wooden steps to the ground from a window, the other dorms had ropes fixed to brackets in the window embrasures. On fire practices, which were usually held once a term on Saturday mornings, the lower dorm left by the steps and occupants of the other two dorms slid down the ropes. On these occasions the instructor would stand outside the building with a stop watch, and if the evacuation was not completed within a minute, it was considered to be a pretty poor show. I never knew of any one getting injured on these drills, beyond enthusiastic types getting rope-chafe on hands and legs.

Fire drill was usually combined with cycle inspection. One of the conditions of entry was that a student should provide himself with a cycle and maintain it in good working order. Bikes tended to become communal and, as there were usually some men working within easy walking distance of the school, there were usually enough to go round; but it is doubtful if there was ever one per man in good working order. On these inspections, anyone short of a machine would hire one from some kindly disposed villager, the going rate for this service was a pint of bitter.

Our educational backgrounds were as varied as our work experiences, and ranged from elementary to public school. To make good any shortfall in basic education, juniors had to attend night school once a week with the headmaster of the village school. I am afraid that we did not take this part of our instruction very seriously.

Usually one day per week was devoted to lectures on forestry by the district officer. In addition there were lectures on botany by the botany master of Lydney Grammar School. Lecture day was the day when one put on reasonably tidy attire, and tried to look alert and intelligent. The latter condition was not always easy towards the end of a summer afternoon. Most of us found the atmosphere of the Dean somewhat enervating. It does not seem possible now that I once had some knowledge of mica schists, terminal moraines, light demanders and shade bearers, not to mention Simpson's Rule of Offsets.

There was an official uniform consisting of a khaki tunic and breeches with a tweed hat. This garb was suitable for walking on a winter's day, but was too heavy and restricting for working. There was, however, an alternative. Practically everyone wore shots from April to September, and disregarded the caress of nettle and bramble on the bare knee. Whenever the weather allowed, it was normal practice to strip to the

waist when working.

Students received a wage of 10s. per week, but by the time various stoppages were deducted, this finished at some 8s. in actual cash. It should not be thought that this was all available for beer and tobacco. Some fortunate few could look for assistance from their families, but for the majority this sum had to provide clothes, boots, dentistry, train fares, and all the little extras inevitable when living away from home. Most of us ended the two years with little sartorial glory, although we may not have reached the extremes of Mr. Jingle who lived on his wardrobe in the Fleet. One gets a little tired of hearing the perpetual moans of modern students on the smallness of their grants. It is the privilege of the student to be poor. An experience of poverty may help a man more in adult life than a knowledge of Greek. All the best story books tell of poor students and poor woodcutters!

There was also a good conduct bonus of £5 at the end of the first year and £8 at the end of the second year, subject to any deductions for infringement of rules and regulations. These payments really were manna from Heaven, and the Fountain Inn, the nearest hostelry, was well patronized on the last night of the school year. I think that the few teetotalers amongst us missed much convivial fellowship on these occasions.

By the exercise of economy it was possible to win a small rake off from the mess account. Each man had a food allowance of 2s. 3d. per day, which was increased to 2s. 6d. in our second year. The school foreman handled the food purchases, and any saving that he could make was shared out at the end of term. One felt that this windfall could be legitimately spent on a little self-indulgence, which for most of us meant a jollification in the Fountain. A 4s. share out per man meant eight pints of beer or 16 pints of "Stunem", the aptly named local cider. It should not be thought that we spent all our leisure in an alcoholic haze, but we were at an age when some prowess at the can is not thought abnormal. "Shall there be no cakes and ale?" Or to quote a more modern source:

"An if some time our conduct isn't all your fancy paints,

Why, single men in barricks don't grow into plaster saints."

Especially if they are aged between 18 and 25!

We managed a cooked breakfast and evening meal, but for reasons of economy and convenience every man on a working party cut his own bread and jam sandwiches and filled a bottle with water; not a very comforting diet on a February midday. It has been said that after two years of this fare some men swore off jam for the rest of their lives.

Apart from the rake off from the mess account, there were other ways of raising the wind. For a time I was one of a syndicate of three who used some of our leisure time in assembling styles. The local sawmill had the contract for supplying these to the Commission but if their carpenter was busy they farmed this work out to us. They were of simple construction, two five-inch square uprights with top rail and foot slats. The oak timbers were delivered to us unplanned. We had to plane all pieces and bevel edges, round off the tops of the uprights, cut out mortices, fit the whole together and secure all cross members with dowels. We had no machinery whatever, but could complete a style in an evening. The

sawmill paid us 7s. 6d. per style, at 2s. 6d. per man it was money well earned.

On another occasion when we were pruning thuya, we found a market for the spray. We spent most of our lunch hour and Saturday afternoons cutting up nine-inch lengths of suitable foliage with sheath knives, scrounged some sacking, and duly railed the produce to a market in the Midlands.

My own personal venture was making walking sticks from natural growth. Unfortunately for this trade the Dean woods do not have a great deal of underwood or hedges to give much material. As many of the colliers ran a few sheep and liked to have a stick, a well-made stick proffered when the prospective customer had "had a few" and was mellow, could usually be exchanged for a pint or two of bitter. So we lived. Sweet are the uses of adversity.

Perhaps it would have been difficult to ensure that every student had instruction in all the many facets of the woodman's and forester's trades. If a criticism were to be made on this score it would be that selection for practical training was somewhat haphazard. However, I do know that no-one in my time could complain that he had not had an acquaintance with the basic trinity of planting, weeding and felling. There was a custom of farming us out to work for the local foresters. These gentlemen would always turn us loose into their most neglected stands, and if they were questioned about the unit costs, why, the idle students were a convenient excuse.

In some respects the Dean was not an ideal training ground. A student coming from hill country might be expected to have some knowledge of turf and plough planting, and drainage in wet peats, but one who had done his initial work in a lowland forest would not have acquired this knowledge at Parkend in my time there.

Two jobs seemed to be obligatory, tan bark stripping and post and stake making. The former was taught more as a curiosity than in the likelihood that we should be called upon to do so in any commercial sense. The then selling price of £2 per ton was not economic, although there was a revival of the trade after the war.

Stake and post making were considered an essential discipline. The material had to be oak, and only dead trees could be felled for this purpose. "Cruising" for the trees, felling and cross-cutting were included in the piece rates for the end product. Stakes had to be split out with wedges, be six feet long and triangular in section with a three-inch face. They had to have a well-tapered point, faces planed with the axe, edges and top bevelled. The rate was 3d. per stake. It was sobering thought to realize that at the end of my first day I should have earned 9d. had I actually been on piecework!

Gate posts had to be squared and planed with the axe, sides between 10 and 12 inches, with edges and top bevelled; the butt left in the round to give greater stability. Such a post was worth 2s. 6d. to the workman. I suppose that some fences are still made with cleft stakes, but I do not see many these days.

Each man was supposed to serve a month at three special duties, orderly officer, forester's understudy and Crown Office clerk.

The orderly officer had the dubious privilege of taking charge of the alarm clock, rouse up the school in the morning and lock up at night. The most important part of his duties related to woodland fires. At times of high risk he was not allowed to leave the premises, had to stand by for phone calls, and round up fire parties from any students who might be available. This was before the days of routine assistance from the local brigade, and to be able to call on a reserve that could be speedily mobilized was a considerable asset to the Dean Foresters. Students received no extra pay on these occasions, but could claim for any damage to clothing. Obviously one wore one's oldest gear at these turn outs, and hoped that anything resembling a singe would be a good for a few shillings when presented to the critical inspection of the forester instructor.

As understudy, the student was detailed to report to one of the foresters, and like Wenceslas' page, tread in his footsteps as he performed his daily duties. The value of this exercise depended to some extent on whether one could establish a rapport with the forester. I consider myself to have been fortunate in having been attached to an elderly gentleman who knew his woods and knew his men. He did not consider it to be his duty to instruct me in office routine, but he gave me practical knowledge of some of the work problems of running a "beat". What knowledge I have of thinning I owe to his kind instruction. It is 22 years since I last marked a thinning, but I like to think that I could still go into a stand and mark a thinning that would be silviculturally correct. It might well be that my efforts would not entirely comply with the Forestry Commission's management tables, but it is my belief that no two stands are alike and each require their own treatment. That's my story and I am sticking to it.

The Crown Office was a relic left over from the days when the Office of Woods managed the Dean, and the official in charge had the title of deputy surveyor. The office was housed at Whitemead Park, Parkend, a house which also doubled as the residence for the deputy surveyor. To be attached to the Crown Office for a month meant that one became a sort of general office dogs-body. My principal task at this establishment was to check the area of every compartment in the Dean with a plainometer. As there are many compartments in some 22,000 acres, I must confess to experiencing some monotony.

It was whilst I was so engaged that I was told an interesting anecdote. It was said that at one time there was a deputy surveyor who had a marked dislike for the Dean, and who looked on his service therein much as a detainee might who was banished to Siberia. He determined to spend as little time there as was possible, consistent with the performance of his office. He lived in one of the counties south of the Bristol Channel. He was fortunate in as much as at that time the country still had a railway system, and that one could have boarded a train at Parkend, and with suitable connections, travel to Istanbul or Vladivostock. The only train to come to Parkend now is a railway society's special from Lydney.

By leaving his home early on a Monday morning he could arrive at Parkend by mid-morning, and he would leave for home on the following

Friday afternoon. On arrival at Parkend he would be met by the Whitemead gardener who would place his bags on a wheelbarrow and follow the deputy at a respectful distance as he made the short walk to Whitemead House. This routine was abruptly terminated one Monday when the deputy collapsed between the station and Whitemead. The gardener, with some presence of mind, put the gentleman into the wheelbarrow and completed the journey to Whitemead, where it was found that the seizure had been fatal.

Among the deceased private papers were instructions that in the event of sudden death, his body was to be taken outside the boundaries of the Forest of Dean for burial, so that he took his dislike of the Forest literally to his grave. I have no reason to believe that the tale is untrue; it would be a strange story to invent.

Now it is finished. The school had hardly celebrated its 50th anniversary before it was closed. Harrison, the Elizabethan itinerist and rector of Radwinter, said "All things change and we change with them". True, but the older we get the less most of us like the change. Memories are left, but as more of us are given the adjective "late", the memories become less, and end like coals turning to ash on a dying fire.

Some of my contemporaries may still remember swimming on a summer evening in Cannop Pond, the water tar-scented from the nearby wood distillation plant; or playing tennis stripped to the waist, and scoring in the "tram lines" when engaged in a singles match. The mournful mid-morning whistle of the colliery, telling the afternoon shift that there was no work. Cycling into Lydney on a Saturday night with a week's pay in the pocket. The rumble of the balls on the skittle alley at the Railway Inn, and the elation at scoring a "spare". The annoyance of the accursed flies that hung over us as we weeded through the bracken. That very pleasant memory, the Sunday morning walk through Churchill Enclosure, with a few choice companions, to the Rising Sun, to drink the pre-lunch pint and listen to the *patois* of the regulars. The autumn colours on the Parkend-Lydney road.

There have been more changes in the industrial and social life of the Forest of Dean since World War II than took place in the whole of its previous history. The most notable was the ending of its major industry, deep coal mining. The deep pits are closed, the railway lines that served them pulled up. Whitemead Park has been demolished and the site is now a Civil Service clubhouse. Cannop Wood Distillation has closed. New industries have been started, and new people have moved into the area.

Well, the Dean School of Forestry is no more, but surely the final insult to old students must be the fact that the Fountain Inn, our unofficial club, has closed its doors.

"They say the Lion and the Lizard keep

The courts where Jamshy gloried and drank deep."

To prove some point Freud said that the Bavarian villagers described the students at the local forestry school as "Lions". There are still lizards in the Dean, but the "Lions", alas, have left.

(A. H. Harrison, 23 Main Rd., Portskewett, Newport, Gwent, NP6 4SA.)

Students of Dean School of Forestry 1904-54

- 1904-05
Aston C. W., Ambury B., Brown T., Christie W.L., Grove W., Humphries W. J., Lewis T., Wye A.
- 1904-06
Aston A., Humphries R.A., Jones A. W., Neale G. L., Nelmes F., Parry F., Smith E. T.
- 1905-07
Burch J. W., Hatton O., Horne G., James E., Jones T., Morgan F., Parnell S.
- 1906-08
Arkell S., Aston O., Butter R., Davies P., Jamieson D., Jones L., Nelmes G., Tribe W.
- 1907-09
Anstoe E., Cheyney C., Gossling W., Grace C., Hewlett A., Lees G., Parker F., Richards G.
- 1908-10
Bell J., Howells W., Hughes T., Jones A., Muscat K., Price G., Reynolds T., Wilkinson H.
- 1909-11
Cooper A., Drysdale R., Froud W., Hanson H., Hatcher P., Macintosh W., Munroe W., Pethick S., Watts J.
- 1910-12
Bennett B., Beachamp S., Macdonald A., Macdonald T., Mackenzie S., Mitchell S., Simmonds W., Taylor F., Adams W., Bennett W., Coy P., Hill W., Hoult G., King W., Lewis A., Pethick S., Roberts J., Rowe M., Walker A.
- 1912-14
Borden E., Brewster F., Butter H., Danby J., Adgcomb P., Hale W., Hemingway F., Hyett T., Jamieson J., Morgan S., Tyler J., Squires C.
- 1913-15
Anderson H., Addison A., Bird E., Drysdale A., Elford H., Humphries G., Jones W., Jones G., Loveridge H., Loveridge R., Mackay H., Powell B., Robertson H.
- 1919-20
Argent C., Beesley S., Collins W., Cousins A., Dyer H., Fermor A., Fletcher H., Gosling A., Lewis H., Marsh E., McClellan H., Mounsey E., Paterson R., Paterson S., Stow E., Wilson A.
- 1920-21
Adams I., Barker N., Hale L., Hyett S., Holyoak E., Knowles A., Lewis T. W., Lambdin C., Morrison R., Price E., Robinson N., Robertson J., Sollis K., Turner L., Satson F., Weeks N.
- 1920-22
Bailey R., Blows H., Birch E., Clarke J., Earp E., Floyd A., Jepson F., Johnson A., Lomas J., Massey J., Rhys J., Slaughter E., Turner W.
- 1921-23
Adams C., Botwright G., Fowle N., Frances E., Gale B., Goodman A., Griffiths H., Reeves W., Sillence L., Spicer N., Webbe A., Williams J.
- 1922-24
Adams B., Adams H., Aston T., Baldwin F., Carter L., Forbes R., McNabb C., Mailer J., Pritchard R., Reid D., Webbe E., Wellington C.
- 1923-25
Browne T., Dudley J., Lawson J., Lyons B., Saville B., Toft W., Williams J.
- 1924-26
Adams J., Beaumont D., Crossley G., Davies S., Edwards L., Evans J., Everitt F., Healey A., Jones J., Lockston B., Morris E., Pallett R., Petley W., Rastall A., Saunders H., Smith B., Webbe H.
- 1925-27
Goodman J., Halsey H., Jackson B., Johnson A., Jones A., Jacovides M., Lewis J., Lewis W., Little T., Morris E., Ierides J., Neale J., Rowland J., Thomas W., Waller H., Watkins S., Young E.
- 1926-28
Antoniades C., Bewick T., Carr C., Clarke S., Davies J., Dizon F., Fuller A., Hendrie H., Hall P., Inglis A., Jackson P., Jones W., Johnson D., Machin F., Maund J., Nickson W., Salisbury J., Tucker E., Vanstone S., Voskarides J., Wyatt L., Watkins S.
- 1927-29
Baker R., Sanzen, Bewick J., Belkett J., Bodman H., Button G. H., Carnell R., Economides A., Hawkins H., Kirkup J., Lewis T., Liddell J., Pye W., Shaw J., Slater F., Tribe P., Williams H., Williams W.

- 1928 Anderson H., Bloor H., Brown S., Beasley F., Davies D., Drake W., Eggleton G., Günter A., Nimmo M., Georghiades J., Price G., Stanhope J., Seilpas P., West S., Williams L., Wynn I., Young H.
- 1929 Bailey R., Boulder T., Coutes A., Davies G., Gwilliam G., King B., Mitchell A., Michaelides E., Moeskos J., Pearson W., Redford C., Reece T., Smith R., Smith W., Weatherell J.
- 1930-32 Clarke J., Davies D., Farrance D., Gillmore D., Hirst J., Harmston D., Jones L., Kenkinson G., Lingwood N., Mortimer F., Morgan D., Mason W., McCavish W., Kamitsis S., Parsons F., Rowland J., Saunders T., Smith N., Tearle N., Qongur M.
- 1931 Davison R., Evans A., Isles G., Jones O., Marston W., Middleton W., Powell C., Purser F., Middleton T., Gough P., Sharp G., Elliott G., Middleton W., Stokoe G., Weir A., Wray N., Walton W.
- 1932 Fawcett E., Haywood A., Jones R., Marsh E., Stewart A., Teasdell F., Woodward F.
- 1933 Brown R., Christie G., Evans J., Frances E., Hall V., Marshall D., Stanley W., Walton R., Waters R., Williams D.
- 1934 Aston S., Chisholme J., Davy J., Edwards T., Evans W., Forrest A., Gulliver W., Hendrie R., Hinds C., Jennings R., Jones J., King L., Lewis C., Tribe N., Wye H.
- 1935 Bruce J., Davies H., Clumb C., Francis R., Gibson L., Hislop J., Jenkins T., Jenkins L., Law H., MacCormack J., Morris T., Moseley G., Oxley G., Smith F.
- 1936 Arnott W., Aston J., Bealand J., Brown E., Cooper J., Daglish G., Evans A., Everitt W., Flemons T., Harrison A., Hutchison G., James H., Jones F., Lloyd J., Massey A., Milsom W., Mitchell V., Morris A., Newell C., Parker G., Ruddock E., Stannard A., Whale R., Wheel P., Wimbush J.
- 1937 Bailey G., Barry T., Griffiths I., Hart G., Hazelden W., Johnson E., Jones J., Lewis D., Marshall J., Rudge, Scott G., Stokoe J., Smith W.
- 1938 Bolan T., Bowen J., Cuff E., Grant W., Harper A., Harrison J., Hendrie J., Lee J., Lloyd P., Mark L., Palmer C., Roberts G., Roberson A., Shepherd W., Thomas D., Waters W., Watts F.
- 1939 Baird R., Butler R., Coles L., Crowe A., Edward I., Fuller H., Jane T., Jones G., Locke F., Locker F., Meadows J., Moses D., Mounsey J., Poll E., Power R., Rees E., Roberts M., Simpson C., Stockley G., Williams T., Young R.
- Course not completed
- 1941 Bird J., Bond G., Evans O., Featherstone R., Flynn A., Goodwin J., Gowings J., Hardy R., Harvey D., Herrod F., James A., Jones W., Loughbrough H., Martindale J., Nicholson J., Norman A., Sherrell D., Simmonds V., Straughan J., White G., Williams W., Wollard R.
- 1942 Bartlett G., Cinderey D., Cummins D., Everitt E., Freeth A., Heardon J., Hedges P., Keens D., McDonald R., Packwood P., Pemberton P., Pearce G., Raynor J., Trodd K., Waygood G., Wilson J., Aubrey P.
- Refresher, 1946 Allison G., Angus R., Bowen J., Coles H., Cousins D., Cuff E., Harvey K., Mackay J., MacCaskill D., McMaster A., McNaught J., Mounsey J., Norman A., Poll E., Reid J., Robertson D., Shepherd W., Stockley G., Wass J., Williams G.
- 1946-47 Austine E., Baird R., Barling F., Betterton S., Blomley A., Bultitude R., Crawford D., Derbyshire J., Eckton A., Featherstone C., Field H., Fowler N., Gerrard P., Hann F., Hinton F., Howland B., Ingram H., Lewis K., McIntyre N., Maddocks M., Martin D., Mills P., Offord P., Olney B., Permain J., Rayner D., Ridge W., Russell C., Salmond M., Olney F., Tackney A., Wills K., Wood P., Young R.

1948-49

Armitage C., Axtell D., Budden C., Cutting D., Cole R., Davis P., Ellis M., Fourn D., Fraser A., Gardner E., Hart R., John A., Joignant M., Kelley G., Leyshon E., Painter P., Parlett H., Pearce H., Perkins D., Reece A., Stanger A., Tugwell D., Verney A., Waller A., Wilson M.

1948-50

Barber E., Bignell R., Cameron S., Clarke H., Coates A., Cooper J., Cooper R., Davies K., Donovan W., Doyle Davidson A., Dovoao S., Drake F., Duffy A., Dunn J., Ede G., Fallows N., Fawcett D., Jargreaves H., House D., Johns C., Johns J., Pardo J., Price S., Redburn T., Rickards S., Ross A., Spencer A., Stacey G., Thick W., Thomas G., Thomas J., Thompson F., Tribe A.

1949-51

Baker H., Boyce R., Catchpole R., Currie G., Evans W., Gray D., Green E., Heavens S., Jemmett R., Kemp R., Lewis W., McKewin E., McLean C., Moore P., North J., Peach J., Rowe J., Sharman G., Spiller G., Stickland H., Sullivan J., Sutton R., Thomas G., Treweeks E., Walsh J., Watkinson R., Yates H.

1950-52

Aspinall E., Ayres G., Baker K., Baldwin T., Beckwith G., Bollam S., Booth E., Brigden N., Bullock G., Carlisle P., Chambers J., Cooper A., Courtier F., Lawson I., Edwards R., Fayle M., Gardner J., Grenfell R., Hamb'lin G., Hine H., Hortop H., Hutchins D., Joslin A., Longman R., Manners C., Morachant R., Mercer T., Roberts A., Sansom S., Scammell R., Taylor G., Wilson A., Wren R.

1951-53

Allard R., Brewer D., Bridge N., Cale G., Cook P., Copping H., Davies W., Devine R., Dunn M., Flood J., Fox K., Hammond D., Harrison D., Hobson K., King R., Langford D., Meredith J., Parnall D., Pickering P., Ricketts G., Scott M., Scott I., Snaith W., Stembridge R., Sturges W., Tee L., Tisdall J., Waters C., Wormell P.

1952-54

Baker D., Beeston R., Bignell R., Brierley R., Brown J., Burt G., Chambers R., Clare P., Denman R., Douglas P., Dunning A., Dymond D., Ellis D., Elms H., Elphick S., Howard R., Howarth J., James M., Jones A., Lawson M., Low J., Manning N., Norman R., Otto C., Parker D., Price C., Ross J., Skinner P., Snell D., Tweedale R., Westacott W.

1953-55

Allwood W., Ballard B., Blackmore I., Bland-Flagg G., Cartwright K., Chandler R., Choules C., Davenhill N., Fox F., Edwards A., Gillespie G., Goss E., Gulbis R., Houghton J., Humphrey A., Induni A., Jones F., Kemp P., Kershaw D., Mellor R., Moberly B., Moules T., Nash H., Payne W., Plumer J., Salt R., Solway D., Stone P.

BEAUFORT FORESTRY SCHOOL (SCOTLAND)

The first Forestry Commissioners were appointed in November 1919 with a grant of £3,500,000 to cover the work for the first ten years. Lord Lovat was appointed Chairman with Sir Roy Robinson Technical Commissioner, Sir Francis Acland (who had recommended that a F.C. commission be established), Lord Clinton, Sir John Stirling-Maxwell, Mr T.B.Ponsonby and Mr W Stewart-Fotheringham. Lord Lovat set about this task in characteristic fashion. Even before he was officially appointed, he invited all the prospective Commissioner and the principal officers to Beaufort (near Beaulieu) for a conference tour round parts of Scotland. To meet the urgent demand for trained men, he provided a site at Beaufort for an apprentice school for Foresters. At the other end of the scale he formed a forestry dining club at which Commissioners and officials dined once a month and met interesting guests. The FC being entirely new there was a free choice in manning the ship and here Lord Lovat was at his best. There were few misfits and for the actual charge of planting operations only foresters of proved ability from private estates were employed.

Extract from Lord Lovat 1918-1928 by Francis Lindley.
Supplied by N.B.Mackenzie

Reference to Beaufort School is made elsewhere in this publication.

BENMORE FORESTERS SCHOOL (BFS) JOHN JACKSON 1931-33

The Benmore Foresters Training School started in 1929 and closed in 1965, formerly the Mansion House of Benmore Private Estate owned by the Younger Brewery family, who bought it in 1889, previously owned by James Duncan a sugar broker from Greenock.

The Younger family handed over the Estate in 1929 in a joint agreement between the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh and the Forestry Commission, for the Mansion House to be used as a Foresters Training School (BFS). The Estate, at the handover to the Royal Botanic Garden and the Forestry Commission, included seven farms and four thousand acres of forest, with the farms and Forestry land and the Mansion House going to the Commission, and the Policies and Gardens to the Royal Botanic Gardens with the two parties working in close harmony. The Benmore Forest school trainees were included in privileged free fishing on the River Echaig.

It proved to be an ideal combination of Utility Forest Trees, Selective Ornamental Trees and a multitude of Flowering and Ornamental Shrubs continually in supply to the Gardens and Policies from the Royal Botanic Gardens.

The Trainees were accommodated in a four storey floor block, with the Dining Room on the first floor and the twenty four trainees living quarters spread over the remaining storeys. The trainees were divided into two classes- twelve trainees in each class- one trainee in each class being included from Northern Ireland and, occasionally, one from the North of England.

The age range for entry was 19 to 25 with one years before entry. We were taught by a Principal (Harry Watson) and a Practical (Bob Donald) throughout the two years of training. We had four term exams each year and a two day final exam at the two year end of training.

The vast majority of trainees were from Forestry Commission owned forests, but, usually three or four in each class were from Privately Owned Estates and returning to them on completion of training. The minimum pass mark to gain a certificate was 50%, the top mark was usually about 80%.

An

amateur Football League (The Essan League) along with a knockout cup (The Dhailing Mhore Cup) operated in Cowal and Benmore School was invariably included as one of the seven competing teams.. Bob Donald acting as President during my two year period (1931 to 1932). I was not any good at playing football but was destined to take an active part in the team. I was appointed trainer. As members of my class reported to commence training in August 1931, the house was still screaming with excitement. BFS had already won the Essan League Championship, and the Dhailing Mhore Cup Final was being played in Dunoan Stadium between BFS and Kim Thistle a week before the two year completion term for 1929-1931 class.. Twenty minutes to go BFS was trailing 3-0. Bob Donald being their President, was a spectator, decided Kim Thistle had won and decided to go home. He was awakened from his bed by a loud knock and shouting at his bedroom door, upon opening his door, he was speechless. There was Benmore Forest School football team Captain holding the Dhailing Mhore cup in his hand. Benmore Forest School had won it by beating Kim Thistle 4-3, thus winners for season 1931. Of the Essan League and the Dhailing Cup- BFS won the Essan League during 1932 to 1933 and Kim Thistle won the Dhailing Mhore Cup.

When the 1931 to 1932 class reported for training at BFS it was informed that an uncontrollable plague of field voles had covered a large part of the Cowal area for the previous three years and although various measures had been taken to combat the menace, none was proving successful. The one most commonly accepted as promising was the introduction of a trapping campaign. This was done by obtaining a large quantity of canister type articles, twelve inches deep by eight inches diameter with an inward sloping loose cover having a central four inch hole. The voles would scurry over these traps, but in doing so slid down through these holes and became trapped.

A trapper called John Ness, of advancing years, visited and emptied these traps every morning and evening, recording the numbers taken. But he had other personal interests in the voles. The Peregrin Falcon nested in Bernice Glen and over the years, and over the years, after building up a good sized aviary, he had been removing fledglings from the nests, rearing them to supply Eastern Sheiks when the birds were old enough to learn Falconry. It was a lucrative means of support to the running of his motor bike and sidecar for domestic purposes, living his bachelor life in an isolated home three miles from the main road on the side of Loch Eck.

The vole plague continued during the 1931 to 1933 years, the grassy slopes appeared to be moving with the volume of voles running over them. The age for 3year (2+1) transplants was suspended and replaced for 5year (2+3) transplants, in an effort to make them more resistant to be eaten wholesale, but plants were still being killed in large numbers by bark being stripped from leaders and branches.

Buzzards, Falcons, Hawks, Owls and Foxes increased markedly in population and certainly played a major part in turning the tide of expansion noticeable by 1936 and then the voles without explanation suddenly disappeared.

The trainees did all new planting and beat up operations, but it was a sorry sight to see so much of these operations destroyed as soon as they were completed.

At the start of the second World War towards the end of 1939 I was promoted from Strathyre Forest to Glenbranter Forest to be Forester in charge and remained in that post during the six year period of War. In March 1946 I was transferred to be Forester in charge of Benmore Forest, remaining in that post until March 1970 on retirement. Harry Watson was still Principle Instructor at BFS when I arrived to take charge of Benmore Forest and at our first meeting he told me I had been Top Trainee for the 1931 to 1932 Class

In 1966 the Forestry Commission decided, after reorganisation including amalgamation of forests, that they would now have sufficient foresters for their requirements and would have no further need for Forester Training Schools and put those operating at the time (two in Scotland, two in England and one in Wales) on the open market.

Benmore Forester Training School was purchased by Edinburgh Corporation to be used as an Outward Adventure Centre for backward children in Edinburgh (for fortnightly periods at a time) and is continually used for that purpose at present.

The choice of Benmore as a site for a Foresters Training School was an ideal one, for the many other interests it held with forestry. The Policies covered a large number of exotic trees and flowering shrubs introduced from foreign lands. It's close association with Benmore Younger Trust and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh giving them trainees a marvellous opportunity to learn the names of these plants.

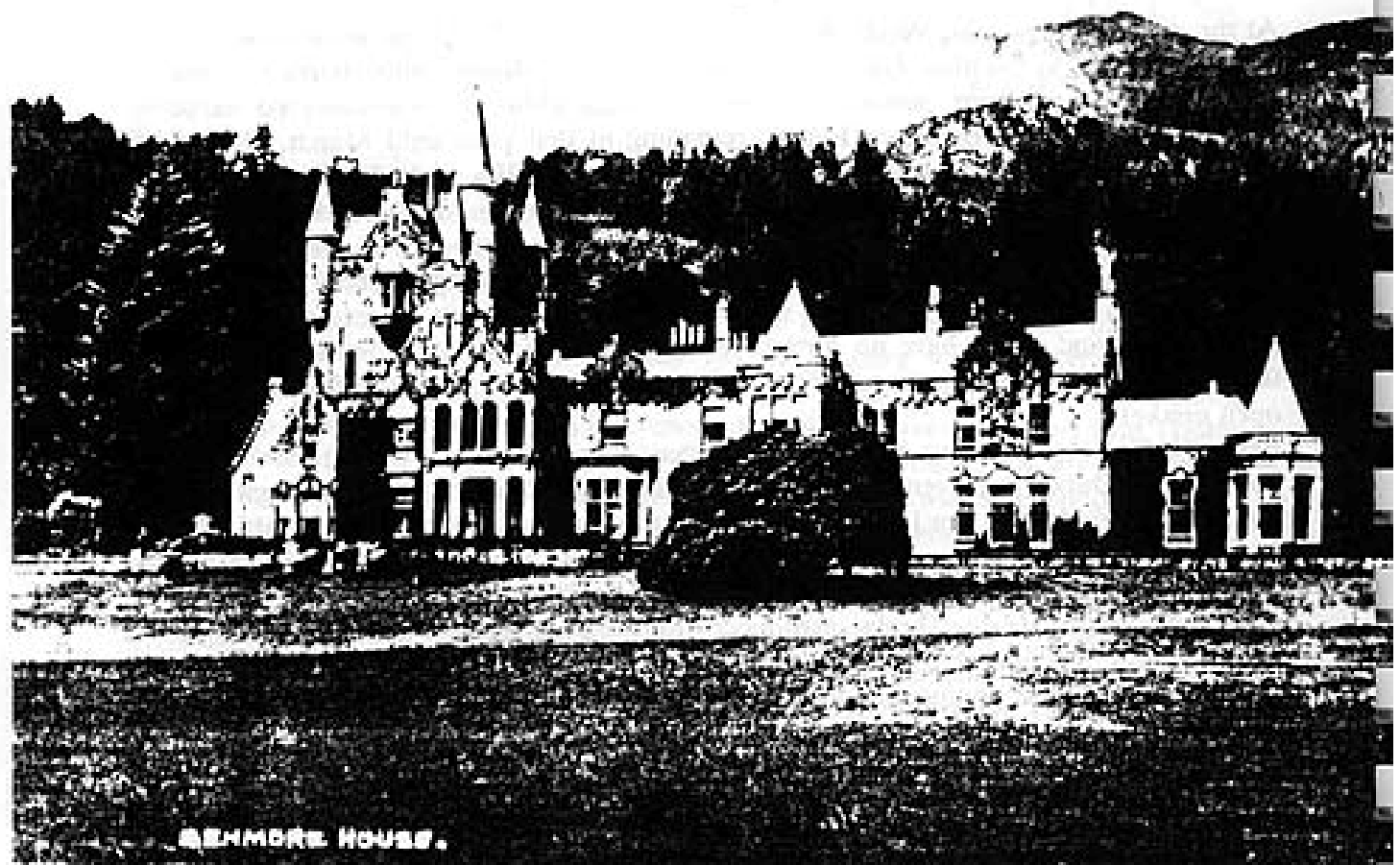
When transferred back to be forester in charge of Benmore Forest in March 1946 with the immediate task of building up a direct labour force (reduced to the middle teens during the war) to cover a twenty acre nursery (supplying transplants to Forests throughout the west of Scotland), a sawmill, an afforestation planting programme up to 600 acres and delayed thinning and draining areas during the war years. The direct labour force reached a peak of 83 during the fifties. I remained Forester in charge until my retirement in March 1970- 24 years.

During these years there was a friendly atmosphere throughout the whole Community, the Benmore and Rashfield Community Association was formed in 1948 with support from Benmore Forester School and from an ambitious decision the communities own Hall was opened in 1959 made possible by the gallant support of local voluntary labour including BFS trainees and moral backing from the Forestry Commission Conservator West, Head office in Glasgow.

Mr Younger also showed his interest in members of BFS in that they were included in the privileged fishing on the River Echaig and that on occasion provided (much appreciated) a new strip for their football team.

After the billiard table was demolished the room was made available for the Benmore and Rashfield Community Association to hold funds for the on going erection of the Community Hall at Uig. A gesture from the Principal of BFS which in a large measure assisted in no small manner the final sum raised- required for the completion of the Hall and to leave something over in the kitty.

So it can be said that Benmore School during it's 37 years in being, played an active part in sharing the Community spirit which prevailed through the locality.



BENMORE HOUSE.

George Pringle Benmore 1940-42.

In 1940 the Forestry Commission sought to reduce it's two year training course to one lasting six months. So it was along with some twenty or so young men, I reported to Benmore Forester Training school on 15th April to put this idea to the test. (the idea was not a success and in the summer of 1941 the normal two year courses were resumed)

We were a very mixed bag hailing from as far apart as the Moray Firth, the Isle of Skye and London. Only two of us had any forestry experience, many came straight from school. Our official title was " forest apprentice"; we had board and lodging and after deductions we were paid 5/- - perhaps a few coppers more- 25p in new money.

Only a few weeks later, Britain had to face up to the evacuation of it's army from Dunkirk. Not long after that Churchill called for men to join the Local Defence Volunteers (the LDV. or as some said the Look, Duck and Vanish). Almost to a man the apprentices enrolled. Jimmy Mc hean, our forester instructor became our officer and some of the few remaining seniors (most of them had been in the TA and had been called up) became our NCO's. We had no uniforms, no weapons. Local ladies made armbands of Argyll tartan with the letters LDV sewn on.. We drilled with the peeled tops of conifers cut to the length of a rifle, and we paraded in our working clothes. For us it was fun. We were totally ignorant of the horrors of war.

The section of which I was a member had as it's NCO a senior who was a great chap, very popular with everyone. His language was as colourful as his figure was built for comfort rather than running and crawling demanded during our training.

During one exercise we were making our way through gorse and other shrubby growth at the head of the Holy Loch in an attempt to reach an "enemy" post without being spotted. This area was subject to flooding and cattle also grazed it. As a result there were large muddy puddles and a profusion of cowpats. K, as section leader was up front and without stopping his crawl he looked back to ensure that everyone was following. Next time his hand went forward it landed in a fresh " deposit". His colourful language was given full reign.. "Hitler's a I'll.....the.....if I ever get my hands on him. A quick clean up and off we went again. Our next problem was a large muddy puddle; too wide to step over, too long to go round without breaking cover, we had no option but to jump. The scrub ahead was tall enough to allow us to do this. K gathered his bulk together, ran, jumped and landed short. His momentum did not pitch him forward on to dry land. Instead he toppled backwards and finished up sitting in several inches of sloppy mud. Hitler's parentage was again called into question and we were left in no doubt about his fate should he ever fall into K's hands. K extricated himself from the mud, told us what he thought of exercises that got him into such a state, that he'd had enough for one night and that he was going home to shower and change.

The time eventually came when we were issued with uniforms and our Home Guard shoulders flashes (the LDV title had been altered to Home Guard) Then the day when a few rifles and some ammunition arrived. We were now armed and could start to patrol- but that's another story. More about the HG later.

Enough of the Home Guard, however, Benmore was a Forester Training School not semi military establishment. For those who know nothing about the place, a brief description might be useful. Benmore, the house and the estate, was gifted to the Forestry Commission (a) by Mr Harry George Younger on condition it was devoted

to afforestation and the advancement of syviculture and botany. Planting of the estate had begun in 1870 by a Mr James Duncan, therefore by the time the FC came on the scene there was already an extensive variety of trees. The collection of rhododendron amounted to over 300 species and the shrubbery and gardens were renowned throughout the west of Scotland.

The house was an impressive building. We regarded it in three separate sections. To the left- viewed from the front- was the tower and the life of the apprentices revolved around this section: the centre part we know as the hostel, this was reserved for university students, lecturers and graduates of forestry or botany but the war put paid to such demands. The right wing contained the billiard room (out of bounds to us) and the senior instructors' living quarters.

Our home was the tower. In it's basement were two rooms where we kept our working boots and dried out our working clothes, and the room which contained showers, wash basins and toilets. It was from the basement that we' went on parade' each morning before going off to our assigned forest operation.

On the ground floor were the instructors' office, the kitchen and dining room and the lecture room. Up a short flight of stairs was the recreation room and then up a few more stairs to the first floor was the first of the dormitories. The other dorms were on the second and third (top) floors. At each level were two rooms, one held five beds, the other two. The rooms were spartan. Each student had an iron framed bed, a small pine wardrobe, a small pine chest of drawers and a chair. By the bed was a small rug. The rooms had no heating. There was a fireplace and central heating radiators but none were in use. Our only fire was in the recreation room. The way up the tower was via a narrow circular stone staircase. From the second floor to the basement was a descent of 70 steps- a long way to spend a penny!

The dining room had two rows of tables covered in oil cloth and the diners sat on wooden forms. In the large bay window was another table and food which normally came from the kitchen in bulk was placed here before being put on individual plate by the duty team of seniors. This duty lasted a week and came round every three weeks or so.

Food! Now there is something to talk about. As far as I know, food was a major topic conversation among Benmore boys from the time the school was established and certainly up to the end of 1942 when the writer received his call up papers. There was seldom enough, rationing didn't help and meals could bring all sorts of surprises. The kitchen staff were all possessed of volatile tempers; heated arguments were as common as the rain. It paid to pass the kitchen door as swiftly as possible to avoid flying scrubbing brushes

Rabbits were plentiful, cheap and off ration and was frequently on the menu. We prayed that rabbit days would be peaceful days in the kitchen. If not the carcasses would not be neatly cut into portions but would be mangled by an irate member of the kitchen staff wielding a meat cleaver and venting his/her anger and this poor bit of flesh. The end product was a plateful of rabbit stew liberally laced with bits of razor sharp bones. There might even be a rabbits head with unseeing eyes peering up from the plate.

One evening a meal of fried, ungutted fish was served up. When we asked why the fish had not been cleaned we were told " The fishman was late and we didn't think you'd be prepared to wait for your meal".

At this time bread was not rationed so we filled up on that, cutting it into cubes and

missing it in our pudding. Malt was also freely available and was used to supplement our jam ration. The chemists in Dunoon never sold so much of the stuff

The highlight of the week was teatime on Sunday. We were given a cake!!

Workwise, we tackled every operation. The chief instructor, Mr Harry Watson, believed that if you couldn't take up a tool and show the men how to do the job you'd never be a good forester i/c. We worked in squads whose composition was changed every one or two weeks. Each squad had an appointed leader. This was supposed to give us training in man management. (Have you ever tried to control a group of 'bolshie', hell raising 18 and 19 year olds who are also your pals?)

Sometimes we would all be on one operation during planting or if there was a rush order for pit props- remember everything was done manually. At other times there would be a number of different operations going on, and we'd be moved from one to another. We walked or cycled to the work area. There was an estate looy but it was used to transport goods and equipment.

If it was too wet to work outside we were sent to the log shed- or did we call it the stick shed? There we sawed and chopped logs all day long. Lectures were held on Saturday mornings. It was very rare for us to be in the lecture room any other time.

Considering that we were being trained to eventually be forester i/c, we never costed an operation, never worked to a budget and seldom touched on any aspect of administration. That was all done as in post training.

Work had it's lighter moments of course as when we started to extract timber via a sectional chute and, until we mastered the art and knew when to end the construction, we torpedoed walls with air borne logs and almost launched them into Loch Eck, or when we were working with the girls of the Womens Timber Corps. Many of the girls had never done any manual work but they tackled anything asked of them and made a significant contribution to the running of the forest. They also provided us with a welcome distraction!

We all had to do a week as house boy. Our duties were purely domestic- collecting the daily papers, tidying the recreation room (dorms were tidied and cleaned by the occupants), carrying in supplies of logs, clearing rubbish
h bins etc,etc.

Today's Health and Safety Executive would have a fit if they saw many of the things we did. Imagine going up 103ft silver fir trimming off the branches about 2ft from the trunk as we climbed, with only a bit of rope round the tree and our waist, no harness no safety line. We were gathering foliage to go as Christmas decoration for our troops in Iceland (?) and we had a deadline to meet. The convoy couldn't wait.. The operation is described in an article by Harry Watson in one of the Forestry Journals. I think the FC got more for the foliage than it did for the timber.

Recreation 1940-42.

During the week our evenings were usually spent in the recreation room listening to the radio, playing table tennis or cards. Very occasionally we'd go to Dunoon or visit friends. Fridays and Saturdays were different, however. We would either attend dances in the local village hall or we'd go to the ballroom or cinema in Dunoon.

The local dances were arranged by a local committee or by ourselves and were usually in aid of a charity; warmth for Warriors was very popular. The profit from the dance was used to buy wool which was then knitted by ladies into scarfs, gloves, socks and

balaclavas for the armed forces. They were great nights lasting from 8pm to 2am. The dances were divided between Scottish and ballroom so all tastes were catered for. I often feel that today's youth don't know what they have missed but perhaps that's just an old man reminiscing.

This was the time of the blackout of course. To the absence of any lights add that many locals wore black oilskin coats as did members of the Royal and merchant navies and collisions along the pavements were not uncommon. As a rule no harm was done but just now and then Bacchus joined the encounter and tempers flared. We could not afford to visit a pub- I don't remember anyone wanting to- but we could still be in a collision. If the other party took umbrage and wanted "to make something of it" a cry of "Benmore" would summon help in a split second. Such was the camaraderie at the school.

In the summer or on Saturday afternoons we would often have a football match. Before the war I believe Benmore Football Club belonged to a local league but that became a casualty of the war. We played either against local teams or teams from the ships and submarines which sailed into the Clyde.

Benmore was very much part of the local community and I suspect that when it closed it was missed.

Benmore Forestry School Home Guard Platoon.

Once armed and kitted out with our uniforms the platoon was able to start patrolling. Our beat began at a point north west of the top of Holy Loch, then along the east shore of Loch Eck and ended at a place called Whistlefield. Other patrols took over at that point.

We were told that at a much higher level there was a fear that the Germans might attempt a seaplane landing on Loch Eck, make a rapid advance to the Firth of Clyde and try to destroy the boom which ran across the Firth from just below Dunoon to Cloch Point. If this was successful the U boats could enter the Clyde and devastate the shipping at anchor upstream of the boom.

Our main defence positions, therefore, straddled the road and adjacent countryside just south of the Loch, and in two's and three's we were assigned to a location along this line. We got to know the area like the back of our hands; every wall, every fence, every tree, every hollow. From our defence points we knew the exact distance we were from every feature. This knowledge was to play a vital part in a near tragedy during training.

We patrolled in pairs and shifts were from 2am to 6am. We had to stop every pedestrian, every cyclist and every car to check the person's identity. On reflection the rules we had to follow were such that had we challenged an armed foe we would both have been killed.

I said we operated in pairs. Each pair one rifle and 5 rounds of ammunition. When challenging, one member approached the "suspect", the other remained a few yards behind. He was the one with the rifle. The rules stated "The rifle bolt will be drawn back and one round will be placed on the magazine platform. The rifle must not be loaded". Now can you imagine what would have happened had the suspect had been real and armed? Before the rifle could be loaded, armed and fired, the patrol would have been shot. Oh what a lovely war! We eventually woke up to the fact that this was no game and rules were changed.

Needless to say there were many amusing incidents during these patrols and I shall relate just one or two. Early one Sunday morning we were along the shore of Loch Eck when we came upon a parked car. As I had the rifle it was my pal who went forward to investigate. My buddy knocked on the car window and called out "Hello there". A rear window was wound down and a man said "What do you want?" "Identity card please". "I'm a sailor on leave, here are my papers". After checking them my pal said "Fine, now can I see the young lady's please" "She's got nothing on her". "I can see that, but has she any identification papers?". The sailor was far from pleased but a scramble through a handbag resulted in the papers being produced. We departed to a lurid description of the Home Guard and it's patrols.

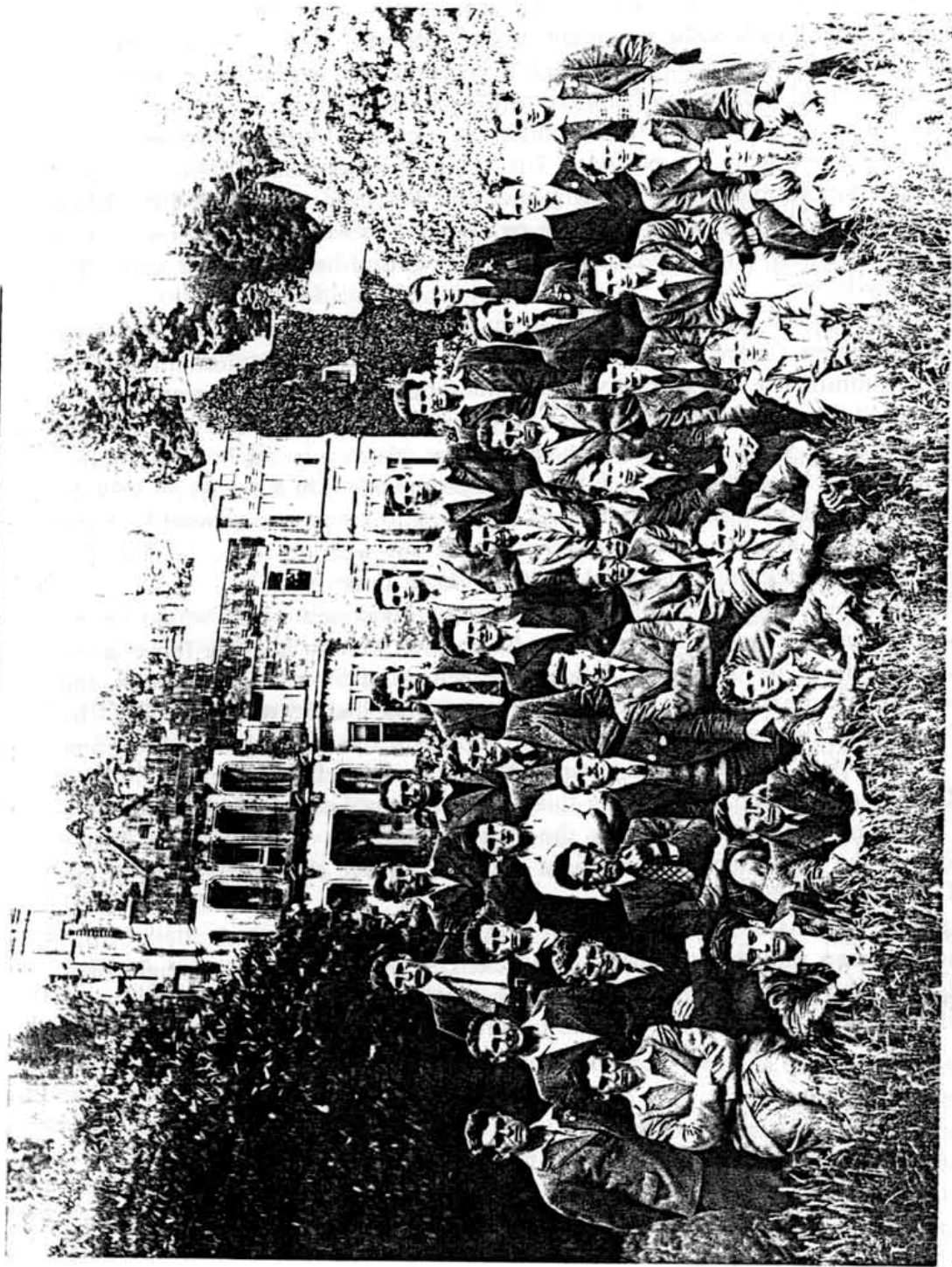
Manning a road block late one Saturday night we heard a cyclist approaching, the shaded cycle lamp betraying it's position. The challenge was made "Halt, who goes there? A female voice called out, "It's only me" and she proceeded round the block and disappeared into the darkness. Whether or not anyone would have opened fire I can't tell, but fortunately for the cyclist someone recognised her voice and said, "It's Mary on her way home"

Now the incident which almost resulted in a tragedy. In becoming rather more professional the Home Guard was ordered to attend parades for a minimum number of hours every month. The school platoon had fallen behind it's parade hours and the officer i/c decided the time would be made up by having a late night turn-out. He told the NCO's that as he wanted to see how rapidly the platoon could become mobile this turn-out was to be treated as a full scale alarm. Only when everyone was on board our transport and we were rolling, was the word to be passed around that this was not an alarm but a practice. On no account was any weapon to be loaded. The "enemy" was the platoon comprising local estate workers, farmers, etc.

We were soon in our defence positions, listening for any sound which would betray the enemy's approach. It was not long before two of the platoon heard a fence creak some distance in front of their post. While one remained to watch and listen, the other went to the command post to report that movement had been heard. "Fine" he was told "they have also been heard at---" and he was given a number of locations. "Go back to your post and await developments". He had hardly re-joined his chum when another fence creaked. Both knew this fence was only about 30yds away. One pushed a round into his rifle and took the first pressure on the trigger. A figure appeared out of the gloom and a fraction of a second before the defender fired, he recognised one of the local shepherds.

An investigation into this incident found that in some way, these two members of the platoon had not been told that this was just an exercise. All along, they thought they were facing German troops. This near disaster taught us how important full and accurate information was and of the need to ensure everyone was properly briefed.

BENMORE 1943-44



REAR ROW

2ND ROW

3RD ROW

4TH ROW

- F. REMBERTON - W. DYE - -

A. FREETH E. C. WEAVERITT - N. I. R. REEVES - J. MATTHEWS D. GARDY J. KING - P. AUBREY

W. CRAWFORD

R. McDONALD - J. MCCABY M. MILNE H. WATSON C. DUNBAR W. SCOTT J. MAXTONE G. E. WAYCOO

N. I.

D. KEENS - - - D. KIRK



At the end of the first year, in mid-summer 1955, we were all sent off to one of the other four Training Schools for a six week period. I was destined for Benmore together with Dave Ayers, Pete Saunders and Steve Vine as the only other fellow Dean students.

I travelled up by rail overnight to Glasgow, arriving at about 6 a.m. My first sight of Glasgow through a wide archway at the station; a scene of cobbled streets, busy with trams rattling everywhere, was very different from anything I had experienced before. A further train journey followed via Greenock to Gaurock to catch the ferry which would take me across the Clyde to Dunoon, all a totally new experience. Transport was provided for myself and the inevitable bicycle for the final stage of my journey up the west side of Holy Loch and on to Benmore. This was my first visit to Scotland. Previously my furthest journey north was to the R.A.F. reception Centre at Padgate and I really was excited by all I had experienced during that morning.

Benmore, previously owned by Sir Arthur Younger and used by the Forestry Commission from 1930, consists of a very large house in extensive grounds which contains the Younger Botanic Collection, now the Younger Botanic Gardens. The house complete with turrets set amongst magnificent specimen trees of the collection with hills in the background and the southern end of Loch Eck just short distance away, really was a complete contrast to anything I had seen before.

As far as I can recall, the number of students was small, possibly not more than ten to twelve, with representatives from most if not all of the other four schools. Domestic arrangements were much like the Dean, with a clean and comfortable bed and adequate meals with provision for sandwiches when out working. Phil Gough was the Chief Instructor, assisted by three others, R. MacDonald, A.R. McLaren and Willy Scott. I remember little of the lectures we had, but I guess what there were had a local or Scottish slant.

I spent most of my working time fencing on the hills behind Dunoon. The weather was glorious, so much so that drought conditions had completely emptied the Dunoon reservoir to the point where we walked onto the hill over the dried up bed of the reservoir. Water was being delivered by road tanker from Glasgow to Dunoon, a distance of around a hundred miles. The view out over the Clyde was really spectacular with lots of shipping to add to the interest. Fencing materials were distributed from the nearest road head by pony with double panniers. It was a memorable job with a magnificent view the whole time we were there. Other jobs included a short spell weeding seedbeds in the Benmore nursery but I am unable to recall any other jobs undertaken.

We certainly went on a number of forest visits to see double mouldboard ploughing on peat and line ploughing on mineral soils. I well remember standing on a road at Strathyre looking up at a bank with intimate mixture of about five different species and discussing subsequent management. We also visited the Ari Mill, a trail blazer in highly automated sawmilling designed for processing the expected increase in volumes of relative small diameter sitka spruce sawlogs from thinnings and early fellings. We also visited a clear fell site where a very large overhead cable crane was being used for extraction, but set-up time was prohibitive for all but the largest clear fells. At the other extreme we saw a horse extraction on steep slopes in thinning.

Our leisure time was spent cycling, walking, hill climbing and swimming in Loch Eck for the braver element. The Cot Inn provided liquid refreshment six days a week but Dunoon as a holiday resort perhaps had more potential for entertainment. We were fortunate in being there for the Cowal Gathering, an all-day event held in a natural arena in Dunoon attended by more than a hundred pipe bands who marched up through the town having arrived from other parts of Scotland by ferry.

Ultimately towards the end of our stay the weather broke with a vengeance. A torrential downpour lasting many hours broke the drought and prompted one of our instructors, Willy Scott, a very keen salmon fisherman, to rush off on leave for a few days. There were a few high jinks at the house during our stay. I well remember Phil Gough's concern to find that a very large oil painting of the owner, Sir Arthur Younger, had disappeared. It was finally found in one of the turret rooms unharmed as it was on replacement. Both journeys must have involved considerable ingenuity!

Two other incidents which still remain in my memory both still bring a smile at the thought. Mike Colley from Lynford went into Dunoon and left his bicycle tied to a lamppost with a piece of string, on the central reservation along the promenade. On his return the bike was no longer to be seen. On calling at the police station to report the 'theft' he was not best pleased at having to pay a fee to redeem his 'lost property'. On another occasion Dave Ayers and I were standing either side of Pete Saunders leaning over the sea wall on the promenade at Dunoon, gazing into the sea that was well up to high tide. Pete, who was always strapped for cash, turned to each of us saying "Five bob to jump in". We both said, "You're on", and in he went, fully clothed including sandals which he always wore. This caused quite a stir on the promenade. Having achieved dry land again, Pete approached with sandals in one hand, the other held out for his winnings which we duly paid. He then plodded across the promenade to the nearby Gents leaving a trail of very large wet footmarks as he went, much to the amusement and amazement of the quite large audience that had assembled. Having wrung the worst of the sea water out of his clothing, we then rode the eight miles back to Benmore.

BENMORE SCHOOL A confession

I was at Benmore School 1956-1958 and the following story always brings me out in goose pimples when I think about it. We were weeding high above Loch Eck and quite bored. So a gang of us collected quite huge boulders and set them off downhill into Loch Eck. As the boulders bounded and jumped their way to the Loch- the Chief Instructor's big black sedan appeared winding its way along the road at the bottom of the hill (Chief Instructor was Phil Gough). No sooner had the car passed when the first stone crashed across the road into the loch.

We had been held in a state of suspension for many moments. What a relief it was to not maim or kill Phil Gough. We never rolled any stones again.

JimWalsham Benmore 1956-1958.

IT TO AERIAL
SPEWY. 1948.

MCINTOSH ON RIGHT
OPERATOR.

DE ROE ON THE LEFT.



STONEL'S INSPECTION.

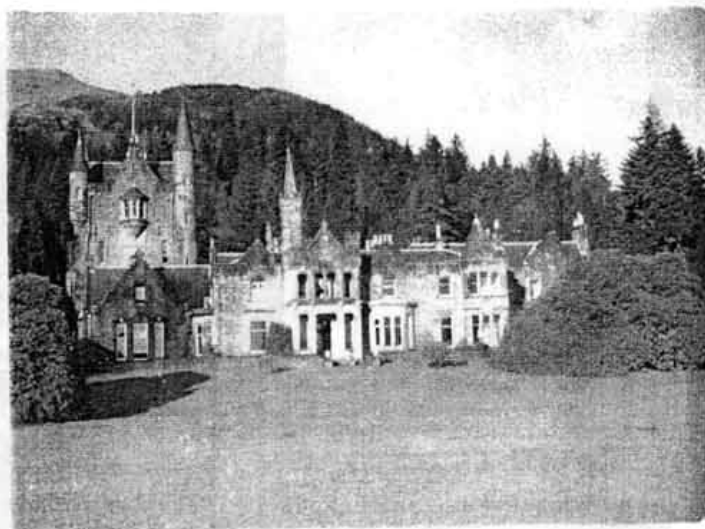
PIPER (COL. BLIMP)

WILCOX SITE. (ADJUTANT)



BENMORE HOUSE.

1948



14 NURSERY. 1948.
 N TAYLOR AND
 THE THOMPSON.



PLANTING,
 ILEN MASSON. 1948

ILL
 'GIVERIN
 TOM
 JOHNSTONE



FOOTBALL TEAM.
 BEN MORE 1948.

