



---

AUSTRALIAN  
**Forest History**  
SOCIETY

---

Newsletter no. 10

September 1995

*'... to advance historical understanding of human interactions with Australian forest and woodland environments.'*

**AUSTRALIA'S EVER-  
CHANGING FORESTS III**

24-27 November 1996 at Jervis Bay

The prospect, canvassed in our last newsletter, of holding a third national conference on Australia's forest history saw a warm response from members. The idea of meeting at Jervis Bay was acceptable to most people and there were plenty of suggestions of other places which we can keep in mind for the future. The University of Canberra has a field studies centre there with meeting facilities and accommodation at a reasonable price; there is also motel and other accommodation in nearby Huskisson. No date suited everybody, but November was the most popular month followed by December. Many thanks to all those who responded to the questionnaire.

The idea of devoting a day of the conference to the topic of 'old growth' was thought to be a good one, provided that it was kept to one day. Particularly in relation to this issue, it is important to re-assert that the Australian Forest History Society is not a forum for political debates on current environmental and forest policies, although one would hope that our historical perspective might provide some insights for them. Two moves are afoot to try and encourage substantive contributions. One, set out later in this newsletter is to encourage some original archival research on the concept of forest age and how it has been perceived in Australia; the other is to invite the eminent forest historian, Oliver Rackham, who has pioneered research into the ancient woodlands of Britain and Europe.

**Call for papers** Now the conference is decided, the call is out for papers - some members have already offered them. We seek a rich and diverse collection. At our second conference, we had a stimulating session of short presentations on work in progress and the suggestion has been made that this be extended to include student papers. The Society has always been open to contributions from people in different ways and levels; ideas would be most welcome as to how we can ensure that this continues. New Zealanders and those from other countries will be warmly welcomed.

Editor: John Dargavel, 20 Laidley Place, Florey, ACT 2615. Tel/Fax (06) 258 9102. email [John.Dargavel@anu.edu.au](mailto:John.Dargavel@anu.edu.au)

## Concepts of forest age: research proposal

The question of the *age* of forests is attracting considerable attention with terms such as 'old-growth', 'regrowth', 'mature' and 'over-mature' being used to describe various stands and forests. Arbitrary definitions of these terms can be found in published forest terminologies and in the specifications currently adopted for surveys of 'old-growth'. While these are useful enough for many purposes, they have a number of conceptual problems related to both forest ecology and human use. Historical research, with its inherent interest in questions of *age*, offers an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the concepts of forest age underlying such terms.

The questions for historical research concern:

- what concepts of forest age have been used ?
- how they originated and evolved ? and
- how they related to changes in the forests ?.

They need to be examined within specific ecological contexts. For example, concepts of age in 'even-aged' forests of mountain ash are markedly different from those in the complex forests of the wet tropics. They also need to be seen in the context of change to the forests themselves. For example, the concept of 'regrowth' can only arise in relation to human or natural disturbance, and the current concept of 'old-growth' has gained prominence in relation to the extensive disturbance of other forests. Advances in the scientific measurement of forest age provide powerful evidence, while cultural perspectives on notable individual trees provide insights on the social values attached to age.

It is suggested that research should concentrate on the period 1870 to 1970 during which Australia's forests were progressively investigated by government and other botanists and assessed by the States' forest services as they emerged. Original archival research in forest service, museum and other sources needs to be conducted in each State with significant native forest areas.

Ideally, the research could be done in time for State papers with a national overview paper to be presented at the national forest history conference in 1996. All papers should be of publication standard. Members are asked to consider how this proposal can be improved and advanced so that our national conference could provide a substantial historical perspective on the topic.

*John Dargavel*

## Carbon dating

John Banks, whose remarkable work in reconstructing the history of the snow gum forests of the Brindabellas will be recalled by members who went on our forest tour in 1988, has been developing the application of carbon dating techniques to forest trees. This enables dates to be estimated for the majority of Australian forests which do not lay down rings with annual regularity. One of the first theses on the use of this technique in Australia was written last year:

Kate Semple. (1994) *A history of a dry sclerophyll forest stand at Mallow Creek, Southern Tablelands, NSW*. Department of Forestry, Australian National University, unpublished. BSc (Hons) thesis.

This study has shown that it is possible to age trees in this forest type by carbon-dating their growth rings. The results showed that the existing stands comprise regrowth trees dating from late last century and early this century. Original trees were dated at over 200 years old.

## Members

Jennifer McCulloch has joined the History Program at The Australian National University. Her thesis, *Creatures of culture*, is to be published by Melbourne University Press. It is concerned with the formation of attitudes to native birds and animals in the period 1880-1930, the creation of the social meaning of certain animals, and the formation of public legislation and policy which attempted to reconcile a conflicting set of attitudes and practices.

John Dargavel is now a Program Visitor in the Urban Research Program at ANU. His book, *Fashioning Australia's Forests*, is being released at the end of September. He is planning to start another book on environmental history early next year.

Elery Hamilton-Smith has continued his interest in the history of cave parks, and as Thomas Ramsay Scholar at the Museum of Victoria, has had the opportunity to pursue this more thoroughly. He is in the final stages of a book on the social and scientific history of caves in Australia. As well as unearthing a great deal of data which had been lost from sight, Elery's work has even re-discovered a number of "lost" caves.

## The lost rainforests

From time to time I see statements that three-quarters of Australia's rainforests have been cleared by European settlers which leads me to wonder where these lost rainforests used to be. When we mapped the vegetation of Australia for the *Atlas of Australian Resources* (vol.6 'Vegetation', Canberra: AUSLIG, 1990), our map of the present vegetation showed 34,000 km<sup>2</sup> of closed forest (canopy height above 10m, foliage cover greater than 70 per cent). Dense pine plantations accounted for about 5,000 km<sup>2</sup> of this structural form; the rest was predominantly rainforests (a reference in the volume to 'around 20,000 km<sup>2</sup> of rainforests' was a conservative generalisation). From various other sources of information, we also know that the main areas where other rainforests used to be. They include the Atherton Tableland; the higher-rainfall sugar and pasture country of coastal Queensland; the Big Scrub, the Dorrigo Plateau, and lesser areas in New South Wales; and a considerable areas in Tasmania. All of these are shown in our map of the re-constructed pre-settlement vegetation, but together only cover about 10,000 km<sup>2</sup>. So where are the former locations of the further tens of thousands of square kilometres of rainforest supposed to have existed?

It is true that at our scale of 1:5,000,000 we could not map the smaller patches of rainforest that occur in favourable locations within other kinds of forest. Where such forests have been cleared, the rainforest patches would also presumably have been cleared. We tried to use overprinted symbols to signal the presence of these. However, the losses of these would probably be of the order of hundreds of square kilometres rather than thousands. In any case, if these losses were included, then the total mapped area of surviving rainforests would also need to be augmented by surviving small patches.

The statements on the clearance of rainforests usually appear to refer to rainforests as normally understood and exclude the low closed forests, or 'thickets' (canopy height below 10m, foliage cover greater than 70 per cent). According to our maps, their approximate area has been reduced from 8000 km<sup>2</sup> to 2000 km<sup>2</sup>.

It appeared from our mapping work that about 45 per cent of Australia's forests had been cleared or thinned in a little less than 200 years and that the rainforests had not suffered a greater proportionate reduction than other

forests. I should be interested to see any factual evidence to the contrary. However, even if considerable areas of rainforests have not been cleared, this does not mean that they have not been disturbed, beginning with the legendary cedar cutters. Even if a larger proportion of our rainforests remains than has generally been supposed, then there is all the more reason to be grateful and to conserve it.

John Carnahan

## A New Zealand forest remnant

Andrew Thomson, who is a botanist and historian of science, has contributed an historical chapter to a book on the natural history and management of the Riccarton Bush or Putaringamotu. In his chapter, 'The Riccarton Bush Reserve', Thomson explains how this small isolated pocket of forest has survived so close to the N.Z. city of Christchurch. Thompson traces the history of the Riccarton Bush Reserve from the arrival of the Deans brothers in New Zealand in the 1840s to the present [1995]. His story focuses on several generations of the Deans family and other people who have contributed to conserving the Riccarton Bush, and legislative and other administrative changes which have enabled the establishment of the Reserve.

One authoritative participant was the botanist Leonard Cockayne, who reported on the botanical significance of the forest in the local press and botanical journals. Just before the 1906 International Exhibition was opened in Christchurch, Cockayne was unable to convince the Christchurch City Council to buy the Riccarton Bush. However eight years later the Deans family gave 6.4 hectares to the citizens of Christchurch, and the Riccarton Bush Act was announced in the New Zealand Gazette of 2 November 1914.

Thompson's chapter is about people and administrative changes, not ecological and botanical changes of the Riccarton Bush; and his illustrations are mainly of people and buildings. I have seen only a copy of Thomson's chapter, and presume that botanical and ecological aspects are covered in the rest of *Riccarton Bush: Putaringamotu Natural History and Management* edited by Brian Molloy (Riccarton Bush Trust, Christchurch, NZ).

Linden Gillbank

**Oops !** In *Newsletter 9* we reported that the Victorian Forests Commission Retired Personnel Association has been in existence for 40 years instead of 15. Thanks to Norm Endacott for the correction.

-----  
**Research in progress:**  
-----

**ACT forests and internment camps**

The overall aim of the project is to design cultural resource management plans for identified Aboriginal and Historic heritage sites in Uriarra, Pierces Creek, Tidbinbilla, Gibraltar and Ingeledene forests. All of these are managed by ACT Forests who have had a number of archeological surveys undertaken and now wish to manage them under an on-going plan.

The historic sites include forestry workers huts, some of which were used as internment camps during World War II: Laurel; Blue Range, Condor and Lees Camps. they are an intrinsic part of Canberra's historical development and the more information the better the context from which management can be designed. It is proving difficult to find enough information about them. Archival searches have not been successful and oral histories held by the National Library appear tangential rather than directly related. Some archival information has been obtained from Steve Welch, a former forestry worker, who managed to retrieve some information on the internment camps during his work on the history of the Uriarra Primary School.

Am I missing some very important and relevant documents which have not been retrieved due to an

obscure key wording? I would be extremely grateful if any member has information which they could pass on to me.

*Keryn Walshe*

GPO Box 3068, Canberra ACT 2601  
Tel/Fax 06 248 5225(w), (06) 242 7382 (h).

**Looking for leads: L. McIntosh Ellis in Australia**

I have been given the task of preparing the entry for L. M. Ellis in the next volume of the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. McIntosh Ellis, a Canadian forester was the first Director of Forests of the New Zealand State Forest Service (1920-1928). He was the architect of the State Afforestation Programme (1925-1934). Ellis abruptly departed the New Zealand forestry scene in 1928 in circumstances that remain unexplained. He established himself as a forestry consultant in Sydney and subsequently worked for APM until his comparatively early death in 1941. I would be interested in hearing from anyone who can provide me with any details of Ellis's career in Australia as soon as possible.

*Michael Roche*

Dept. of Geography, Massey University  
Private Bag 11-222, Palmerston North, NZ  
email: M.M.Roche@massey.ac.nz

-----  
**IUFRO news**

IUFRO's Forest History Group had a successful meeting at the World Congress in Finland and laid plans for future meetings. The Tropical Forest History working group will be chaired by Ajay Rawat (India) with Richard Grove (Australia) as co-chair. A new working group on the history of hunting has been formed.

A forest history conferences on multiple use will be held in Vienna on 2-4 May 1996. One sponsored by the Forest Ecology Group of the British Ecological Society will be held in Nottingham on 2-6 September 1996. A conference on the timber trade is planned for sometime in 1997 to be held in Florence. The next full IUFRO Congress will be in Malaysia in 1999 or 2000.

**Environment and History journal**

The last issue of the newsletter foreshadowed the publication of this new journal. Defining itself as an interdisciplinary journal aiming to draw together researchers in the humanities and biological sciences, its appearance has been keenly awaited. Issue No. 1 contains forest history papers on Guinea and pre-colonial South-east Asia. There is also erudite paper on China and a thought provoking comment by Michael Redclift.

Issue No.2 will include Tim Bonyhady's 'Artists with axes' in Australia, two papers related to Indian forests and a paper on global botanical networks and the Chinchona tree. Issue No. 3 will be a special one on forests, soils and conservation in Zimbabwe.

## Book reviews

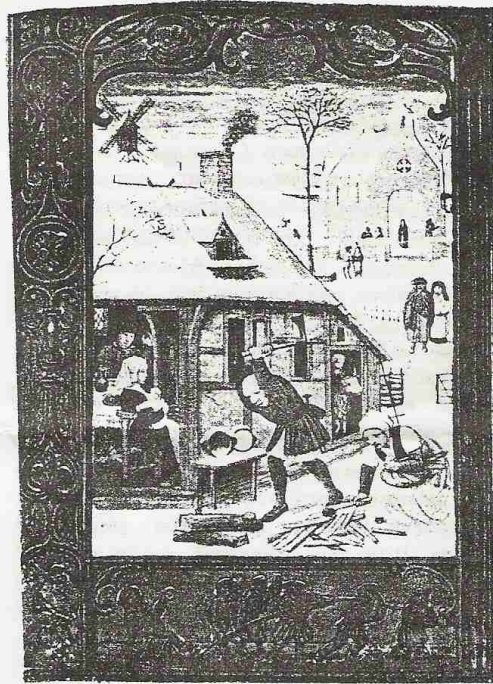
Karen Twigg. *'Sixpence for a piece of timber': a history of Bowen and Pomeroy 1894-1994*. Bowens, 88 Peters Avenue, North Mulgrave, Vic 3170. 1990 (188p).

This is the other side of the forest debate. It is a proud book celebrating 100 years in business by the Victorian family timber firm of Bowen and Pomeroy. The founder, Richard Bowen was born in 1864. His parents had emigrated from Ireland in the famine year of 1847 and his father worked as a miner on the Victorian goldfields. There were six children. Richard left home at 17 to seek his fortune in Melbourne. By 1890 he was in partnership as a scrap metal dealer in Dryburgh Street. This led him into the timber business and a partnership with his brother-in-law Redmond Pomeroy in 1894. The Pomeroy family did not stay actively in the business for long. On Richard's first day in his timber yard he only sold sixpence worth of timber.

It was the energy, entrepreneurial skills and imagination of three generations of Bowen family directing the company over the years that led the company to success. And it was a sense of community engendered by the Bowen family in the workplace that enabled them to survive strikes and the depression. In a series of interviews Twigg conveys the importance of belonging to the firm. In her preface she points out a distinct ethos often described as the 'Bowen tradition'. She says that this is characterised by the company's friendly personal style of doing business, a family-style atmosphere and concern for honesty, integrity and fair dealing. This ethos 'informed the whole culture of Bowens and was the heart of the company's identity'(vi).

This reviewer has found that the 'Bowen tradition' is a characteristic of the industry. Managers are admired for being first class practical men and having ethical standards. It may be that this surety about their own integrity that has led them to a hurt inability to understand the green debate. The greens on the other hand should not ignore these strengths of loyalty and purpose within an industry still bound to its gemeinschaft beginnings.

This book is fascinating for the similarities shows to histories of other Australian family timber companies. Bowens began humbly with scrap metal and second-hand timber and proceeded to building supplies, timber,



January from a 16th century Flemish calendar

joinery and country building. There seems to have been no doubt that sons would follow fathers and learn every aspect of the business; there were few privileges. The Bowen family produced three generations of leaders; Richard the founder, Jack the consolidator and John the present managing director. Jack was only 15 when his father died in 1926 and for ten years the firm was run by two loyal employees, Charles Barras and Jack Dowling.

Jack Bowen took the company from the difficult World War II days through the 1950s' building boom and into the eventful 1960s. Both Richard and Jack ventured into sawmills when timber was short, but these were not profitable and Jack found that it was better to finance some sawmillers rather than own mills. They also obtained timber through well-known firms such as Alstergren, Gunnensen and the Kauri Timber Company.

Twigg draws the reader's attention to the very important change, introduced in the 1960s, to the 'one-stop shopping centre' approach to marketing for the domestic suburban retail market as well as the traditional building trade. By 1984 Bowens had changed its whole

approach and had eight one-stop centres encircling Melbourne and employing 250 people. Now such timber and hardware firms being are threatened by the new American concept of the giant 'super store' able to advertise heavily and offer a large range at low prices. In 1994 Bunnings opened the first of these in Victoria. Ironically, until shortly beforehand Bunnings had been a strongly-based family firm with a similar culture to Bowens. It was said that men would walk over a cliff for Dickie Bowen and barefoot from Manjimup for Charlie Bunning. John Bowen realises that super stores will change the timber and hardware business but hopes that the building trade will respect the smaller firms' reputation as 'an ethical family style operation providing personal service and reliable advice' (p.151).

The book is extremely well researched and presented with an interesting mosaic use of individual interviews and employee histories, photographs, graphs and statements. It is full of warmth and a sense of community and belonging. It is a book which should give the timber industry pride in its past and encourage it to a constructive future.

Jenny Mills

Peter Taylor, *Growing Up: Forestry in Queensland*. St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin for Queensland Department of Primary Industries (242 pp.), \$34.95.

It seems an opportune to publish a history of Queensland forestry. The long period of establishment of professional forestry in the state, the bitter conflicts over land alienation, the difficulties in getting the plantation estate established, and the recent conflicts over the Wet Tropics and Fraser Island are now 'history'. Forestry in Queensland (at least the growing trees and timber production part of it) is now an established business operation headed by an 'Executive Director' not a 'Conservator'.

Having previously written a few lines about forestry in Queensland, myself, I delved into Peter Taylor's book with some interest. The aim of the book is clearly set out in the introduction: '...to explain forestry in Queensland: how and why it started, how it developed and what it does now. This explanation is directed to the general reader ... it is not aimed at those involved with forestry, although they may find some of it useful'. This I considered to be a curious aim for the first published history of forestry in Queensland, which surely would

find considerable interest among those involved with or interested in forestry in the state. It has resulted in a book which in its content and level of analysis is somewhat disappointing though it probably achieves its basic aim.

The volume is divided into two parts. Part One is a seven chapter 'history'. Part Two is a historical treatment of themes. Given the many facets of forestry, this is a sound approach with Part One setting the context into which the themes in Part Two can be placed. I found Part Two more satisfactory than Part One, probably because some depth could be developed in the topics chosen: native forest management, plantations, fire, sawmilling, changing uses, technology and Fraser Island.

Part of the problem with Part One is that Queensland is not reached until mid-way through the third chapter. Chapter One looks at Australian vegetation in geological time and Aboriginal impacts. Chapter Two draws heavily on John Perlin's *A Forest Journey* to look at wood use from ancient times. Together, they take up about one-quarter of Part One but give little information on Queensland - discussion about which begins without any basic outline of the types of forest and woodlands in Queensland and their distribution. The remainder of Part One chronicles the development of the Forestry Department and its policies and practices until the present. One chapter is devoted to the Swain era (1918-32) during which time great strides were taken in forestry in Queensland. Unfortunately, a number of aspects are not discussed or not well developed. Examples include: the development of the timber industry and its influence on policy, the dominance of land settlement in rural public policy and the resultant forest conservation-land alienation conflict, the rise of professional forestry in Queensland and its national and international context, conservation philosophy and its changes over time, and the role of the two World Wars in utilisation and policy.

For the general reader, the book will give a reasonable picture of forestry development, but the author's goal of explanation is let down by lack of analysis. For example, little is said about the role of the timber industry in shaping policy and the limited control the department was able to exercise over the industry. Nor is there much reference to the 'wise use' conservation philosophy which underpinned Australian professional

forestry and needs to be explored to understand the forestry paradigm and how it came to be increasingly at odds with different conservation philosophies in recent times. This is exacerbated from the beginning of the book (p ix) where 'foresters' and 'conservationists' are separated into stereotyped opposites and multi-faceted meanings of conservation are not explored. Another annoying aspect of the author's style is to set up 'misconceptions' which are then corrected. Two of these are in Chapter One: the perception that 'forests are timeless' and the perception that 'before the arrival of Europeans, Australia was almost entirely covered with forest'.

The book is not an academic treatise - that was not its intention. No references are given in the text, though it is clearly evident from which sources some of it is drawn. Various extracts are reproduced in the text most without precise referencing. The book is well illustrated with both black and white and colour photographs and the historical photographs are very well produced. Unfortunately, quite a few of these do not relate to the text where they are placed and the value of many would be enhanced by explanatory annotations. The profiles of individuals included in some of the chapters are an excellent way to gain insights to what life was/is like in forestry. It was pleasing to see a profile of Sam Dansie, whose blunt statements in the late 1970s on rainforest management put him off-side with many of his colleagues. The book could have had some more of these.

In summary, this is a readable 'balanced' account of forestry in Queensland providing a reasonable account for the general reader. In this it might be considered to have achieved its primary aim, however, I found it rather long on description and short on the explanation promised in the introduction.

Kevin Frawley

### Publications noted

Grove, R.H. (1994). A historical review of early institutional and conservationist responses to fears of artificially induced global climate change: the deforestation-dessication discourse 1500-1860. *Chemosphere* 29:1001-13.

This paper reminds us that the contemporary alarm over climate change has a much longer history. Worries that

deforestation led to dessication in various parts of the British Empire and the tropics were raised in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Grove shows that the debates in the Royal Geographical Society in London during the 1860s were particularly important in the rise of forestry in India and South Africa. It would be interesting to see how far they also influenced Goyer and colonial scientists in Australia.

P. Saenger, P. and B.J. Stubbs (1994). The Investigator tree, Sweers Island: a natural historic monument. *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Queensland* 104:67-78.

Individual trees can take on cultural significance from their Aboriginal use, such as canoo trees, or from European exploration and settlement, such as The Dig Tree of the Burke and Wills expedition or the Old Gum Tree at Glenelg under which Governor Hindmarsh proclaimed the colony of South Australia. Many are now recorded on the Register of the National Estate. This paper traces the history of a tree on the Gulf of Carpentaria first inscribed by Mathew Flinders in 1802 and marked by subsequent explorers. The tree was damaged by a cyclone in 1887 and most of it ended up in the Queensland Museum.

Libby Robin (1994). Nature conservation as a national concern: the role of the Australian Academy of Science. *Historical Records of Australian Science* 10(1): 1-24.

The rise of the modern era of forest conservation owes much to scientific concerns raised in scientific fora such as the Royal Academy of Science and CSIRO. This paper traces these links and examines those between the Academy and the formation of the Australian Conservation Foundation in the 1960s.

R. Grove, V. Damodaran and S. Sangwan (eds) (due March 1996). *Nature and the Orient*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2 vols. (1156pp.)

This may well be the largest book on environmental history so far published. It needs to be to encompass 29 chapters most of which are devoted to India. The first volume deals with how nature was constructed and the landscape changed from 10000 BC to 1980AD; the second with colonial forest management and its impact on indigenous societies.

### New Zealand publications

A major gap in New Zealand's forest history has been filled by Peter McKelvey's *Steepland Forests*. Forests and forestry are also discussed in Alan Grey's new historical geography.

McKelvey, P. (1995) *Steepland Forests A Historical Perspective of Protection Forestry in New Zealand*. Canterbury University Press, Mary Sutherland, 1893-1955, Forester. Christchurch.

Grey, A H 1995 *From Aotearoa to New Zealand*. Canterbury University Press, Christchurch.

Roche, M (in press) William and Joseph Butler, sawmillers and timber merchants; and Mary Sutherland, 1893-1955, forester. *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*.

### Forest history at the International Conference of Historical Geographers

Perth, July 1995

Michael Roche

A number of papers directly or indirectly concerned with forest history were presented in the Reserve Management section of this conference. Environmental history more generally was the theme of the opening seminar which included presentations by Geoffrey Bolton (Edith Cowen) and Joe Powell (Monash). Other papers dealt with the timber industry and land settlement -in the jarrah forest of Western Australia, the forest settlements and community in Victoria, and State forestry in Victoria and South Australia. One session in another seminar threw new insights into the early oceanic firewood trade in New Zealand in the context of the ballast needed by sailing ships. I found the most relevant papers to be:

Powell J M (Monash). Historical geography and environmental history: an Australian interface.

Bolton G. (Edith Cowen) The state of environmental history in Western Australia

Seddon G. (Western Australia) Writing environmental history

Gale S W and Hawork R (New England) European impact and the landscape of New England, Australia.

Legg S. (Monash) Consuming passions: Parliament and the forestry debate in Victoria and South Australia. 1170-1939

Sanders D. (Curtin) The jarrah forest: European management of a unique resource

Wynn G. (British Columbia) Re-mapping Tutira

Winfield J. (Melbourne) Contested resources in 19th century Victoria: the Central Highlands

McIlwraith T. (Toronto) Ships ballast and the staples thesis

### Forthcoming conferences

*The literature of Australian natural history.*

8 December 1995, Canberra

Contact: Nick Dyson, Dept of English, Australian Defence Force Academy

*Australian Historical Association*

14-17 July 1996, Melbourne

Contact: Andrew Markus, Dept of History, Monash University (Clayton campus).

*Mueller conference*

29 September - 1 October 1996, Melbourne

Contact: Linden Gillbank, Dept of History and Philosophy of Science, University of Melbourne

### New Membership Application

Name:

Organisation (if any):

Address:

Tel: Fax:

email:

Field of interest in forest history:

Mail to: John Dargavel, 20 Laidley Place, Florey, ACT 2615 with \$10 cheque or postal order for 1995 subscription (overseas free).

### The next Newsletter

Please send details of work in progress, ideas for new studies or requests for information. The Newsletter is a good way to keep in touch.