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# Australian Forest History Society

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Newsletter No. 68  
April 2016

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



## A forest winching station somewhere in the Australian bush

Logs are being loaded from a landing onto a pair of steel tramway trucks. These logs have been hauled into the landing using the double-drum winch shadowed under the roof in the left background. Once loaded they will be hauled up an incline using the single-drum winch on the right (there would be a return pulley at the top of the incline). Between the two winches is a shed covering a boiler serving both winches. Suggestions as to location gratefully received. The photograph is undated and may have been taken anytime from the early 1900s to the late 1930s, although steel-framed log bogies would suggest the 1930s. (*Photograph: Peter Evans postcard collection.*)

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### MEMBERSHIP

Membership of the Australian Forest History Society (AFHS) Inc is A\$25 a year for Australian and New Zealand addressees or A\$15 a year for students. For other overseas addressees, it is A\$30.

These prices do not include GST as the AFHS is not registered for paying or claiming GST. **Membership expires on 30th June each year.**

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Australian Forest History Society Inc.  
PO Box 5128  
KINGSTON ACT 2604

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### NEXT ISSUE

The next issue will be published in **August 2016**, and the issue after that is planned for **December 2016**.

**Input is always welcome.**

Contributions can be sent to  
[Fintan.OLaighin@agriculture.gov.au](mailto:Fintan.OLaighin@agriculture.gov.au).

### AFHS FIELD TRIP TO THE HAWKES BAY REGION OF NEW ZEALAND - SEEKING EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

*By Sue Feary*

Those of you who attended the society's most recent conference at Mount Gambier in October 2015 will remember Ewan McGregor's presentation on his land restoration and tree planting projects around Hawkes Bay. Ewan and I got talking over a few glasses of red and hatched a plan for a possible field trip to New Zealand to see some of his projects first hand and explore a wonderful part of the country.

We have done some initial costings and put together a very preliminary itinerary for a field trip of around five to seven days, ex-Auckland. We don't want to progress the planning until we have some idea of the level of interest from society members. Included in the itinerary so far are farm forestry, historic homestead gardens, botanic gardens, PanPac pulp mill and associated radiata pine forestry, several arboretums, as well as the famous Art Deco Napier ([www.artdeconapier.com](http://www.artdeconapier.com)).

**WHO IS UP FOR THIS  
EXCITING OPPORTUNITY?  
A FIRST FOR THE SOCIETY!**

#### *Basic information about the proposed field trip*

- ✦ Five to seven days based in the Hawkes Bay region, including travel to and from Auckland and visiting places like Lake Taupo on the way.
- ✦ We would hire a self-drive minibus, with a maximum of twelve passengers including the driver, with some members sharing the driving.
- ✦ Accommodation around 3-star, in ensuite cabins in caravan parks, at several different (fabulous) locations.
- ✦ Mix of self-catering and combined dinners and/or lunches. We would probably have a "kitty" for shared food, such as picnic lunches while out in the field.
- ✦ Cost around \$1000-\$1200 for bus hire and accommodation (share), excluding airfares and any activities with a fee (such as visiting a museum or going on a commercial tour, etc).
- ✦ If there are many more than twelve seriously interested we could go to a larger bus with a driver, or two smaller self-drive buses; each would add to the cost but not that much.
- ✦ Tentative date September/October 2017.

If you are genuinely interested please let me know as soon as possible - [suefeary@hotmail.net.au](mailto:suefeary@hotmail.net.au) or (02) 4441 5996 or 0428 342 758.

Once we know the numbers we will arrange accommodation and ask for a deposit.

Partners are welcome, but society members will have first priority. However, if we end up with two 12-seater buses, there should be plenty of room for all.



## SOUTH-EAST NSW SAWMILLS

By Ian Barnes

I'm currently researching the sawmill files held in the forestry office at Batemans Bay, NSW. These files cover an area best described as south-east NSW, since 1917, and there are at least 300 sawmill licences involved, many changing hands a number of times. As I go, I note some of the unusual items and these two came up.

### *Night Soil in the Forest - An Early Forest Fertilisation Scheme?*

In a state forest near Braidwood, there was an unusual Occupation Permit. To formalise an existing practice, on 18th February 1971, Permit No. 12830 was issued over an area of two acres within Monga State Forest (now national park) for the purpose of a "Site for Sanitary Depot". The permittee was the owner of the nearby Monga Sawmill and therein lies a clue of its existence.

Ever since at least before 1917 when the first sawmill licence was issued to Joshua Frederick of Reidsdale, a small community lived in the upper Mongarlowe River valley centred on its productive *Eucalyptus fastigata* forest. Living in the bush at least eighteen kilometres from the nearest local government services required local residents to attend to their own night soil disposal. So, because private property was scarce and they were surrounded by state forest, the sawmill organised a collection service and disposal of the collections on state forest. For this (in)convenience, each year, the Forestry Commission received \$4.00 in "rent". The night soil had to be deposited in trenches, as approved by the local health inspector, and covered with earth not less than ten inches in thickness.

A map of the permit area exists. It might be interesting to find the site and see what sort of boost in growth the pseudo forest fertilisation scheme ever produced.

### *Rip Saw Meets Iron Spike in a Sawmill - Sawmiller is Unhappy*

On 18th May 1959, sawmiller HE Ryan of East Lynne, Batemans Bay, wrote to the Forestry Commission of NSW with an unusual complaint regarding sawlog quality from the nearby Boyne State Forest. He describes the situation at his sawmill as follows: "imbedded in the aforementioned log an iron staple as used in securing the (telephone) line which was completely covered by overgrowth as to deceive both your (log measurement) employee and our benchman thereby causing an accident which luckily was confined to our machinery and injured nobody. The machinery for which I make this claim consists of one forty four inch circular rip saw valued at £38-14-3".

The Batemans Bay Senior Forester investigated the source of the iron staple and found that trees marked for removal by the Forestry Commission foreman had indeed contained the remains of an old telephone line through the bush. He also verified the damage to the saw. He duly reported Mr Ryan's claim to the South Coast District Forester who, in turn, sent it upstairs to Head Office in Sydney for legal advice. Head Office approved of Mr Ryan being paid compensation for the damage with an explanation. "The law on the matter is

based on a duty of care to avoid acts or omissions which it can be reasonably foreseen can injure persons, who are so closely and directly affected by such act that they should have been contemplated as being so affected when the act was carried out." It was deemed reasonable to assume that a metal spike placed in a tree would eventually become overgrown, thereby hiding it from any subsequent sawmiller's detection and, by not removing the spike at the time of abandoning the telephone line, it became a Forestry Commission responsibility. It was noted that no such responsibility could be assumed as the spike could have been placed by someone else, such as "campers, hikers and the like".

Therefore Mr Ryan was paid his compensation but, of course, not before releasing, per a wordy document, "Her Majesty the Queen, the Government ... and the Forestry Commission" from all further claims relating to the matter (and his signature was duly witnessed)!

## AFHS CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

The ninth national conference of the AFHS was held in Mount Gambier in October 2015 and Rob Robinson and Sue Feary are working hard on finalising the proceedings. The majority of papers are now edited and ready for publication. Thanks to everyone for submitting their papers in such a prompt manner. We are hoping to have the proceedings on our website and limited hard copies available in the next few months.

## SCOTTISH DIASPORA TAPESTRY EXHIBITION

By Sybil Jack

The Scottish Diaspora Tapestry is the creation of Prestoungrange Arts Festival in Prestonpans, a small town to the east of Edinburgh, Scotland. Scots have migrated all over the world and have often had a profound impact on the areas where they settled. This project brought together stories from such communities, documenting their Scottish connections in more than 300 embroidered panels on a tapestry. It is a remarkable and heartfelt homage to the determination, courage and achievement of Scottish migrants and their descendants across the centuries. One panel marks the contribution of Scots to forest conservation in India. The exhibition was in Sydney from 23rd March to 3rd April, and is now headed to New Zealand and North America. For more information, see [www.scottishdiasporatapestry.org](http://www.scottishdiasporatapestry.org).



*Tapestry panel commemorating Indian forest conservation.  
Photograph by Sybil Jack.*

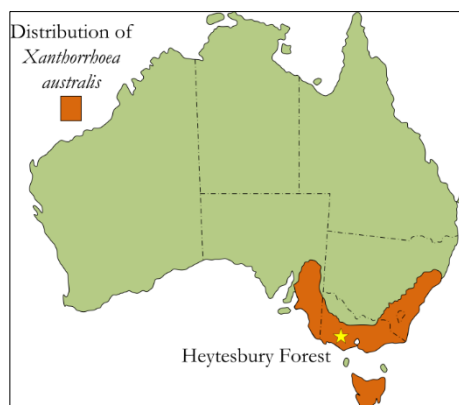
## GRASSTREE GUM

By Peter Evans

Coastal Australia is home to plains covered in grasstree. There are almost thirty species of this plant; the species growing in the south-east is *Xanthorrhoea australis*. The slow-growing grasstree was important to Aboriginal people, who used the stem for spears, nectar from the flowers to prepare a sweet drink, and the resin exuded by the tree as an adhesive. European settlers were quick to realise the potential of the resin for making a cheap varnish, but believed that the grasstree plains had little agricultural value (the soil was thought to be "poisoned" by the resin exuded from the trees).

The first real interest in the grasstree plains was in 1882, when Victorian Inspector of Forests William Ferguson made a field survey of the Heytesbury Forest in the south-west of the state:

Leaving Cobden on the south, and proceeding a few miles through fair forest land, the first of the grass-tree plains come in view, stretching far on either side of the track. Viewed at a distance they appear like a luxuriant crop of young green corn. So evenly have they grown that at first sight they appear to be all of the same height and color. So beautifully are those grasstree plains surrounded by wide belts of timber that they present to the eye the appearance of a large oasis in the forest ... The first of these grass-tree plains met with is about eight miles from Cobden, contains an area of about two square miles, and is surrounded by wide belts of gum, messmate, and stringybark timber; the timber being in most places inferior, and fit only for firewood. On all sides of this plain there are winding creeks, with abundance of fall for drainage purposes. The surface is mostly of peaty nature, with a good layer of black decomposed vegetable matter on the surface, and the subsoil a sandy clay of considerable depth, which has a greasy feel when pressed with the hand.



Soil samples were obtained for testing, and it was hoped to establish an experimental farm on two small blocks to test the fertility of the grasstree plains. But, by the end of the year the plan had collapsed as the area to be tested

was flooded by heavy rains. After a change of government in February 1883, any thought of opening up the grasstree plains was abandoned for a quarter of a century.<sup>1</sup>

It was estimated there were 60,000 acres of grasstree plains in the Heytesbury Forest suspected of being no commercial or agricultural use.<sup>2</sup> Others thought differently. In 1908 Joseph Evans Harrison of Carlisle River in Victoria patented a process for "extracting liquids and gaseous matters from trees and other growths".<sup>3</sup> In September of the same year he proposed to put this into practice and applied for the right to cut grasstree in the Heytesbury Forest for the manufacture of varnish and other products. His application was gazumped by a Dr Black from Western Australia (a former Chairman of the Perth Board of Health), who was awarded a lease of 100,000 acres at Heytesbury in order to manufacture industrial alcohol from the sugars in the plant (but apparently made no attempt to commence harvesting). Harrison transferred his application to adjoining areas to the east. His intended factory would cost £500, employ seven men, and treat five tons of grasstree per week. The grasstree stems would be placed in an air-tight chamber and treated with steam. The gum then dropped from the stem, was strained and run into moulds to solidify. Harrison expected to find a market for the product in London.<sup>4</sup>



Grasstree plains. Photograph by SJ Jones.  
SLV image H82.43/146.

However, both Harrison and Black had competition for the resource. After preparatory work in 1906,<sup>5</sup> in early 1908 the Victorian Department of Agriculture was voted £10,000 to clear 1000 acres of grasstree plain and create an experimental farm in the Heytesbury Forest, six miles south of Cobden, and situated on the ridge dividing the Curdies River and Scotts Creek.<sup>6</sup> The farm site was to be ploughed using traction engines and used for testing the suitability of various crops (with the aim of encouraging eventual settlement). It is probable that the completion of the clearing work at Heytesbury led the government to cancel Dr Black's lease in March 1910, with the land to be made available for selection from December of that year.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Colac Herald*, Friday 28 April 1882, p4; *Advocate*, Saturday 8 April 1882, p21; *Geelong Advertiser*, Friday 18 August 1882, p2.

<sup>2</sup> *The Australasian*, Saturday 19 December 1908, p7.

<sup>3</sup> National Archives of Australia: A627, 12767/1908, barcode 4150088.

<sup>4</sup> *Camperdown Chronicle*, Saturday 26 September 1908, p3; PROV, VPRS 11563/P1 unit 270 file 47/1939.

<sup>5</sup> *Ballarat Star*, Saturday 20 October 1906, p8.

<sup>6</sup> *The Age*, Tuesday 25 February 1908, p5; PROV, VPRS 5357/P0 unit 3183, file P1920/card 50.

<sup>7</sup> *The Age*, Friday 18 November 1910, p11; Wednesday 23 November 1910, p14.



Even so, Joseph Harrison had not given up on his scheme to produce varnish. With Dr Black out of the picture, Harrison formed a syndicate in October 1910 to pursue the work.

The principal partner was to be John Watt, a stock and station agent from Temora in NSW (but then based in Cobden). The partners applied for cutting rights over 5000 acres on a grasstree plain in the parish of Coradjil, and 5000 acres on the Cooriemungle Creek. They got little or no response from the Lands Department and, by 1914, had competition in their application from John Cuthbert, A. Figgins and C. Sheffield, who apparently were also after the grasstree for commercial use. By this time it was all getting too hard for the Lands Department, which decided that grasstree was forest produce and shunted the applications off to the Forests Department.<sup>8</sup>

Apathy on the part of the Forests Department (which had a bigger fight on its hands attempting to protect commercial quantities of timber in the Heytesbury Forest from being selected and destroyed)<sup>9</sup> meant that none of these applications were successful. Neither was the Department of Agriculture's settlement scheme. Despite initial high hopes,<sup>10</sup> by 1913, large parts of the reclaimed land had returned to scrub and grasstree and, of the fourteen surveyed blocks available, only four farms were under establishment. The best of them was on the site of the original experimental farm. The waste of up to £20,000 on the clearing scheme attracted strong criticism in the press.<sup>11</sup>



*Traction engine and balance plough at the Heytesbury experimental farm. The soil conditions were a nightmare for such heavy engines. Unknown photographer. SLV image rmg-u231.*

The onset of the First World War put paid to any further work either on the grasstree clearance or the scheme to produce varnish. Too late was it realised that grasstree gum yielded large amounts of picric acid for potential use in war munitions.<sup>12</sup> Following war's end, large tracts of what grasstree might have been harvested had been selected and were in the process of being transformed into dairy farms.



*The Heytesbury Forest in 1894. Pressure for selection meant that only tiny remnants remain today. Photograph by Arthur Jordan. SLV image H96.160/443.*

## FORESTRY AT WAR - CANADA POST COMMEMORATES "BLACK HISTORY MONTH"

*By John Dargavel*

To follow on from our items about Australian forestry companies, this item about the Canadians may be of interest. Phil Evan sent the first day cover envelope commemorating the No. 2 Construction Battalion, released by Canada Post in February 2016 to mark "Black History Month". The text on the back in English and French tells an interesting story.

"When (Canadian Prime Minister) Robert Borden (later Sir Robert) called upon Canadians to volunteer for war in 1914, citizens responded eagerly. In the eyes of local recruiters, however, not all volunteers were welcome. Although they were willing to fight for their country, many Black Canadians were turned away. In response to protests - and the need for more manpower in Europe - military officials created the No. 2 Construction Battalion on July 5, 1916. The following spring, more than 600 soldiers left Halifax for France where they worked with the Canadian Forestry Corps to harvest, mill and ship timber to the front. A few men found ways to join other units and wound up fighting at Vimy Ridge and other battles of the Western Front, but most served with the Forestry Corps, where they faced challenging conditions, segregated accommodations, and arduous work. Some did not return home. The No. 2 Construction Battalion served Canada with pride and determination, paving the way for Black Canadians to enlist freely in the Canadian Forces in the second world war and thereafter."



<sup>8</sup> PROV, VPRS 11563/P1 unit 270 file 47/1939.

<sup>9</sup> Evans, P. (in prep). *Forest or Farm? The Battle for the Heytesbury Forest.*

<sup>10</sup> *Geelong Advertiser*, Saturday 27 March 1909, p4; *Colac Herald*, Monday 14 February 1910, p3.

<sup>11</sup> *The Age*, Friday 14 March 1913, p6; *Weekly Times*, Saturday 14 November 1914, p17.

<sup>12</sup> *Punch*, Thursday 16 September 1915, p39.

## THE BOORARA MYSTERY

By Roger Underwood

Everyone who has ever lived in the small south-west town of Northcliffe in Western Australia is instantly familiar with the word "Boorara". There is the *Boorara Road* running out to the south-east from town to the most remote farms in the district. There is the *Boorara State Forest* which, before the 2015 bushfire, was one of the most beautiful karri forests in the region. There is the *Boorara Brook*, a major tributary of the Gardner River, and also now the name of a locality in the Shire of Manjimup (postcode 6262) through which the actual brook flows.



And of course there is the once-famous *Boorara Tree Fire Lookout*, still standing, but truncated and looking the worse for wear since the fire. There are even some old foresters who remember the Great Boorara Fire of March 1969. Until 2015, this was the worst bushfire in the history of the karri country, whose scars are still seen in the landscape and felt on the psyche of those old foresters.

I was reminded of these names, events, places and scars on a recent visit to the National Anzac Centre in Albany, WA. There is a footpath leading from the main museum up to the nearby peak overlooking King George's Sound, and the path is

lined with plaques giving a picture and information about each of the ships that transported the Anzac troops to the Middle East in 1914. One of those ships was His Majesty's Australian Troopship *Boorara*. Given the convoy codename A42, HMAT *Boorara* sailed with the second transport fleet in December 1914, carrying six officers, 108 other ranks and 387 horses. Reading this set me off on a search to find the links between the troopship *Boorara* and those names I knew so well down in the karri country where I once worked as a junior forestry officer.

First to the ship. It has an interesting history. It was originally a German freighter the *SS Pfalz*, built in Bremen in 1913. The ship was berthed in Melbourne in August 1914 when the war started. On the day Britain (and consequently Australia) declared war on Germany, *Pfalz* attempted to break out into the open seas, but the militia battery at the Port Phillip Heads had been warned to "stop her or sink her". After a warning shot was fired across her bows, the *Pfalz's* captain turned back to port. Here his ship was immediately "requisitioned" (i.e. confiscated) by the Australian Government. It was renamed *Boorara*, and converted into a troop and horse carrier. Incidentally, that warning shot to the *Pfalz* was the first fired in anger by British Empire troops in World War I.

HMAT *Boorara* operated in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean throughout the war as a troop transport and also carried Turkish and Italian POWs. She was torpedoed (twice) in the English Channel, but survived and was repaired on both occasions. In January 1919 she made a return voyage to Australia, repatriating Anzac troops from Europe and the Middle East. There were no horses on the return trip; they were left behind for quarantine reasons.

A tragic event occurred on the return trip of the *Boorara*. Not far out from Fremantle, one of the soldiers (who was suffering from severe post-war stress), jumped overboard and was not seen again.



HMAT *Boorara*. Photograph by Alan C. Green.  
SLV Image H91.325/711.

Having completed her task of returning the troops, *Boorara* was put up for sale by the Australian Government, purchased by a Greek shipping line and renamed *SS Nereus*. After another 20 years plying the seven seas as a freighter, mostly carrying timber from Canada to the United Kingdom, she eventually ran aground in a storm and was lost on the coast of Vancouver Island. But all of this begs a question. Why was she named *Boorara* for her wartime work? And what is the origin of this word? And why did the name re-appear in the south-west karri forest?

My first stop was my forestry colleague John Sclater's authoritative book, *Last your Block? The origins of WA's forest block names* (2001, ISBN 0646410075). This didn't help. According to John, *Boorara Tree Fire Lookout* was named after *Boorara State Forest*, which was named after the *Boorara Brook* ... but there was no mention of why *Boorara Brook* was so-named. Just then I had a tip-off from another forester, the military historian Graham McKenzie Smith, with whom I was discussing these puzzles. He mentioned that in the late 1890s there had been a gold mining town south-east of Kalgoorlie (gazetted in 1897) called *Boorara*, now long abandoned. It had been named after the nearby *Boorara Hill* ... and I found that I could still find the site of the abandoned mine and town site on a goldfields maps. Presumably "*Boorara*" is a word from the local Aboriginal dialect.

The next move was to send a query to the archivists at "Landgate" (the Department of Lands and Surveys) over the identity of the surveyor who named *Boorara Brook*, and the date it was named. This disclosed that the brook



was named by surveyor F. Pitt in March 1924. Pitt was one of the many surveyors laying down the surveys for the future Northcliffe Group Settlements. But what was his link to the name "Boorara"? At first I considered that he may have been involved many years earlier in the survey and naming of the town of Boorara in the Goldfields, or perhaps had worked there as a miner before becoming a surveyor. Then further research by Graham McKenzie Smith suggested a connection. Military records disclosed that Trooper Frederick Pitt, a farm manager from Katanning, aged 25, enlisted in the AIF and sailed to France in February 1917. He returned from the war in January 1919, and the timing of his return makes it likely that he returned on the troopship *Boorara*.

Perhaps Trooper Pitt and Surveyor Pitt were not the same man. But because I am an incurable romantic, I like to think he was and that, after his war service, Pitt became a surveyor, and in the early 1920s was working on the Group Settlement surveys at Northcliffe. By selecting the word Boorara as the name for the *Boorara Brook* he was commemorating his safe return to Australia and civilian life.

A remaining question is "why was the *Pfalz* named the *Boorara*, back in 1914?" This led me to contact Keith Quintin, a Victorian historian who has researched the story of the thwarted escape of the *Pfalz*. I found him to be a mine of information. There were seventeen German freighters at various ports around Australia on the day war was declared, and all were requisitioned by the Australian Government. These ships were then given names taken from a list of Aboriginal words by some unknown naval officer associated with the establishment of the convoy fleets. Other familiar Western Australian place names were bestowed on the HMAT *Araluen* (formerly the *Scharnfels*) and the HMAT *Dongarra* (formerly *Stolzenfels*).

Thus I feel I am close to a theory that explains an intriguing puzzle. Boorara Tree Fire Lookout was named after Boorara State Forest, which was named after the Boorara Brook, which in turn was named after the troopship *Boorara*. The troopship was named after the Western Australian goldmining town of Boorara, which in its turn was named after the nearby Boorara Hill. Then again, one of my Queensland colleagues threw in a spanner. "Boorara" is also the name of a Queensland cattle station, and perhaps this was how the word made it onto that list of Aboriginal names. Whatever, a final mystery is the meaning of the word "Boorara" itself, if there is one, in the Aboriginal dialect for the goldfields region or that of north Queensland. It may even be one of those Anglicised words, copied down by an early explorer. I am not sure if this question will ever, or can ever be answered, but await contact from an expert linguist that will explain everything.

## INHUMAN RELICS OF THE AUSTRALIAN FORESTRY SCHOOL

By John Dargavel

These are not some set of ancient troglodytic foresters as some might at first suppose, but the artefacts of the Australian Forestry School (AFS). I have taken on the task of finding good homes for those that came to the Australian National University (ANU) when the AFS closed in 1965. The artefacts are the evidence of a notable and sometimes controversial part of Australia's forest history, and are I think of heritage value. The need to find good homes for them was prompted by the refurbishment of the Forestry Building, because few other people at ANU knew what they were, and because unlike older universities, ANU does not have its own museum. This is a note of progress to date.

**Herbarium.** There was a herbarium room that contained material from the AFS and various student and research projects. It was in a poor state, largely unindexed, of no interest to the botanists at ANU and sent to the tip. There were also collections of conifer cones and eucalypt seeds that had lost their labels that met the same fate. One written register was lodged in the ANU archives. A collection of Russell Grimwade's photographic plates of eucalypt flowers was transferred to Melbourne University's archives where Grimwade's papers are held.

**Xylarium.** The large wood collection is the most scientifically significant artefact. A display collection is in the Forestry Building, but the major part of the wood sample collection and the collection of microscopic slides is in storage at ANU. A heritage assessment was commissioned and a paper describing the history of the collection has been published in *Australian Forestry*.<sup>1</sup> Another paper describing the history of all of Australia's wood collections has been published in *Historical Records of Australian Science*.<sup>2</sup> A possible sale to a Chinese university was raised, but not followed up. The collection is not usable at present.

**Sporting trophies.** A collection of silver trophies used in sports competitions at AFS was displayed in the Forestry Building at ANU for many years and suitable homes suggested.

As noted in a previous newsletter, the Anzac Cup was transferred to the Army's Engineering Museum. The remaining cups are being stored at ANU pending possible display at an open day next year.

**Glass lantern slides.** The glass lantern slides of South Australian scenes were donated to the Mount Gambier library, and the slides of other states and of the USA have been donated to the library at the Creswick Campus of the University of Melbourne.

<sup>1</sup> Gordon Dadswell, John Dargavel & Philip D. Evans, 2015. "Wood collections in Australia: a history of expansion and retraction", in *Australian Forestry* Vol. 78 Issue 1, pp18-28. Institute of Foresters of Australia.  
[www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00049158.2015.1011798](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00049158.2015.1011798).

<sup>2</sup> John Dargavel, Philip D. Evans & Gordon Dadswell, 2014. "From Science to Heritage: the History of a Wood Collection", in *Historical Records of Australian Science* 25, pp43-54. CSIRO Publishing.  
[www.publish.csiro.au/?act=view\\_file&file\\_id=HR14004.pdf](http://www.publish.csiro.au/?act=view_file&file_id=HR14004.pdf).

## TRACTION ENGINES IN THE VICTORIAN BUSH

By Peter Evans

In the Victorian boiler registration records<sup>1</sup> there are 43 traction engines directly registered to owners active in the Victorian sawmilling or firewood industries. Of these engines, eighteen, or 42%, were built by John Fowler. The second most popular make was Buffalo Pitts, with nine engines, or 21%; with Marshalls, Ruston & Hornsby, Foden, William Foster, Burrell and Case all represented in the remaining 37%. There must have been many others listed in the now-destroyed boiler correspondence files. Most of these traction engines would have been involved in the transport of sawn timber or have been the power source for a sawmill, but a significant number were involved in logging as well.



*A Fowler traction engine hauling split mining laths near Ballarat c.1900. The engine was almost certainly owned by the Skinner brothers, wood merchants, and ended its days powering a firewood mill at Bealiba. Photograph by George Black. SLV image H39615.*

Most of the traction engines involved in logging would have been used where the terrain and soil types favoured the use of heavy machinery. This was especially so in the flatter areas of Gippsland around Rosedale, Briagolong, and Maffra.<sup>2</sup> Traction engines were also popular in north-east Victoria at Violet Town, Barnawartha and Baddaginnie, and along the Murray at Wodonga, Barmah, Koondrook and Mildura.<sup>3</sup> Many operated in the Western District and the Wimmera. At Balmoral in the mid-1920s, the Western Sawmilling Company had timber rights over 13,000 acres of the Kongbool Estate and employed a Clayton & Shuttleworth traction engine and several wagons hauling logs to the mill at a cost claimed to be half that for logs hauled by horses. The use of mechanised power allowed 1000 super feet of logs to be

hauled one to two miles for the cost of 6s 6d; two to three miles for 8s 0d, six to seven miles for 11s 0d, with the average haul being four miles.<sup>4</sup> There was also a sawmill at Vasey Siding near Balmoral that used a Burrell road locomotive builder's number 2949 of 1907 to haul logs to the mill. The engine is currently preserved as *Vasey Lady* at Lake Goldsmith, and is perhaps the best known former logging engine in Victoria. However, there was one sawmilling firm that persevered with traction engine haulage for a very long period and usually in difficult terrain. That firm was McCashney & Harper.

### *McCashney & Harper*

Henry McCashney entered the sawmilling business sometime around 1895 in partnership with Trehwella Brothers in the Wombat Forest. After moving to Mount Macedon with James Frith, he returned to the Wombat Forest in 1910 and continued sawmilling, both in his own right and in partnership with his sons.<sup>5</sup> In 1910, Henry McCashney purchased a new traction engine built by John Fowler. This was number 11983 of 1910.<sup>6</sup> The engine may have been used to power the mill, but was more likely used for logging, which set the pattern for the McCashney family's operations for the next fifty years.

### *The Toombullup sawmill and tramway*

A new mill was established in 1916 at Toombullup (south of Tatong) shortly after the opening of the Tatong Railway. The mill was built on a tributary of Ryans Creek some 24 kilometres from the terminus of the railway. Sawn timber was dispatched to Tatong by tramway over the worst of the uphill section before being transferred to wagons for transport over the road.<sup>7</sup> It was soon obvious that the tramway would have to be extended all the way to Tatong if transport was to be guaranteed all year round.<sup>8</sup> The tramway reached Tatong in December 1921, having cost £300 per mile.<sup>9</sup> Two horse teams, each of seven horses, hauled the timber from the mill to a point known as "Half Way". From the Half Way, two teams, each of five horses, hauled the timber to Tatong railway station.<sup>10</sup> In the early 1920s Henry McCashney sold part of his interest in the mill to Mr JA Harper, and the firm became McCashney Brothers & Harper. In 1923 Henry McCashney bought his brother William's interest, and the firm became simply McCashney & Harper.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>1</sup> PROV, VPRS 7854/P1 and 7854/P2.

<sup>2</sup> Victorian boiler records above. For an example, see Little, G, 1998. *There's the Mill Whistle: The boyhood memories of George Little*. Stratford Historical Society Inc. See especially p31.

<sup>3</sup> Victorian boiler records above. For an example see Moulds, FR, 1991. *The Dynamic Forest: A History of Forestry and Forest Industries in Victoria*. Lynedoch Publications. See especially p108.

<sup>4</sup> PROV, VPRS 425, unit 911, serial 9552.

<sup>5</sup> Houghton, N, 1980. *Timber and Gold: A History of the Sawmills and Tramways of the Wombat Forest 1855-1940*. Light Railway Research Society of Australia, Surrey Hills. See pp65 and 71.

<sup>6</sup> PROV, VPRS 7854/P2, unit 20, BIA 1985.

<sup>7</sup> PROV, VPRS 11563/P1, unit 251, file 37/0118.

<sup>8</sup> PROV, VPRS 11563/P1, unit 4, file 21/0200.

<sup>9</sup> Harper, A, n.d. *McCashney & Harper Sawmill - A Short History*. In *Tolmie: The First Hundred Years*. Printed by the Mansfield Courier.

<sup>10</sup> Kirk, G and Sheil, G, 1986. *The Tatong to Toombullup Tramline*. In *Light Railways No. 91*. Light Railway Research Society, Surrey Hills, Melbourne. See pp7-8.

<sup>11</sup> Harper op. cit.



## *The Toombullup mill*



*The Toombullup mill.*

*Photograph by HC Engelke, image courtesy Sheila Hutchinson.*

McCashney & Harper retained the same 10nhp Fowler traction engine used by McCashney & Sons for logging in the Wombat Forest. In 1922 a second traction engine was registered, also built by John Fowler, but the boiler was noted to be "very old" at the time of inspection, so this was probably an older engine purchased second-hand.<sup>12</sup> A third and similar John Fowler traction engine was purchased new in 1923.<sup>13</sup> One of the engines was used to power the mill, while the other two served on logging duties. In service, each traction engine was usually accompanied by a horse-drawn Furphy water cart containing 200 gallons of water. The man in charge of this was also responsible for providing dry timber to fuel the traction engine. The traction engines were used to bring logs to a number of horse-worked tramways over which the logs were transported to the mill. Logging by traction engine had to be concentrated during the summer months, and logs were stockpiled at the tramway landings to provide a supply for winter cutting.<sup>14</sup>



*Fowler traction engine hauling logs to the Toombullup mill.*

*Photograph by HC Engelke, image courtesy Sheila Hutchinson.*

Despite the large amount of money expended on the tramways and the investment in three traction engines, by the beginning of 1920 McCashney & Harper were

losing £150 per month. This was largely due to a shortage of railway trucks as the firm had a large amount of timber stockpiled at the Tatong railway yard without being able to get it to market. This was seriously affecting the firm's cash flow. In addition, the traction engines were handicapped by the poor state of the roads and tracks in winter and, as a consequence, logging from more distant areas was restricted to the summer months. The losses continued throughout 1925, 1926, 1927 and 1928. The firm struggled on until November 1928 when there was virtually no timber available to the present mill site.<sup>15</sup>

## *Kellys Creek mill*

The firm took advantage of the timber strike of 1929 to shift the mill to a new site a little closer to Tatong and on the opposite side of Ryans Creek. The new mill was established on Kellys Creek (at the same point that the Kelly Gang had used for a hideout and from which the gang had launched their attack on the police camped at Stringybark Creek).<sup>16</sup> The new mill was completed in early 1930. Log tramways were extended up the valley and logs hauled to the landings using the traction engines. This mill site was short-lived as the valley was rather small and, at the end of 1933, permission was obtained to move to a new site. The machinery was dismantled and the move took place during April 1934.<sup>17</sup>

## *Watchbox Creek mill*

The mill was rebuilt on the Watchbox Creek. The firm intended to continue using the traction engines for logging at a time when many other sawmillers were thinking about changing to crawler tractors.

The Watchbox Creek site was approaching the end of its cutting life by the end of 1935. Permission was given to move the mill to a new area at Bakers Creek near Mansfield at the beginning of 1937.<sup>18</sup> Here the firm retained the old traction engines almost to the end.<sup>19</sup> In 1950 the mill was shifted to Barjarg where it operated until 1972.

One traction engine survived abandoned in the bush at Bakers Creek. In the early 1970s, Fowler 11983 (the first engine owned by McCashney but, by then, legally owned by the Forests Commission of Victoria as an item abandoned on Crown Land) was removed from the bush by a machinery collector. It languished on his property at Belgrave South for many years until sold-on locally with the stipulation that it be preserved in Australia.

Unfortunately, this historic engine is now in the UK, having been illegally exported without a valid permit under the *Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986*. Had such a permit been applied for, no doubt its export could have been successfully defended. It is now unlikely that the engine can ever be returned to Australia.

<sup>12</sup> PROV, VPRS 7854/P2, unit 52, BIA 5150.

<sup>13</sup> PROV, VPRS 7854/P1, unit 56, BIA 5585.

<sup>14</sup> Kirk, Sheil op. cit., pp10-11; Harper op cit., p67.

<sup>15</sup> PROV, VPRS 11563/P1, unit 251, file 37/0118.

<sup>16</sup> *The Age*, Thursday 26 September 1985.

<sup>17</sup> PROV, VPRS 11563/P1, unit 251, file 37/0118.

<sup>18</sup> PROV, VPRS 11563/P1, unit 251, file 37/0118.

<sup>19</sup> PROV, VPRS 11563/P1, unit 226, file 42/1835.

## JAMES BLACKBURNE'S LETTER BOOKS PROV, VPRS 14889/P1 UNITS 1 & 2

By Peter Evans

This series held by the Public Record Office Victoria consists of two volumes donated by Mrs CW Watson of Wangaratta in 1976. All the reports in volume (unit) 1 are very concise and most are only one page; all but one being made in the same hand (the sole exception being Agnes River), and relate to inspections for the creation of new or additions to existing timber reserves. The reports have been ascribed to forester James Blackburne.



Stephen Legg has left us a word picture of James Blackburne (left, in 1900) in *Passionate Advocates* (in *Proceedings of the Eighth National Conference on Australian Forest History*, Brett J Stubbs et al, 2012).

Blackburne was born in 1839, and was appointed a probationary Forester, Caretaker and Bailiff of Crown Lands in January

1877 and confirmed in that position in August of that year. He remained in the job until his resignation in February 1881, but was back in the position exactly one year later when he was placed in charge of the Carisbrook forest district. In 1889 he was elevated to the position of Inspector of State Forests and became an Officer of the Professional Branch of the Public Service. Blackburne is credited with the establishment of Arbor Day in Victoria in 1890. He was a passionate advocate for the forests under his control, and was responsible for the joint authorship of a report which led the Victorian Government to establish the *Royal Commission on Forests*, which sat from 1897 to 1901, and resulted in the creation of a separate Forests Department in 1907. Passed over for the position of Conservator following George Perrin's death in 1900, James Blackburne was forced to retire. However, he continued to lobby for forest conservation and protection from further alienation as chief spokesman for the National Forests Protection League. He was so effective that he was re-employed in the Forests Service in an attempt to muffle his voice. Blackburne died in 1923.

His surviving letter books are important for a number of reasons. The first volume gives us a valuable snapshot of Victorian forests in the year of 1885 through the one set of eyes. Later entries concentrate on individual forest problems - sawmills, fire, grazing, illegal occupation, mine-prop and scrub cutting. Some give correspondence or file number references which might repay further follow-up. The entries listed below are in the same order they appear in the first volume; some are assigned page numbers but some are not.

### Forest reports 1885-91 (unit 1)

	Year	Page
Neerim Timber Reserve	1885	1
Dandenong State Forest	1885	2
Meering, Wandella, Boga	1885	3
Bael Bael, Kerang district	1885	4
Terrick Terrick West	1885	5
Seymour, Heathcote, Costerfield	1885	6
Rodney Timber Reserve	1885	7
Alexandra Timber Reserve	1885	8
Mount Samaria Timber Reserve	1885	9
Moyston Timber Reserve	1885	10
Tottington Reserves	1885	11, 12
Longwornor (Mia Mia)	1885	13
Strathbogie, Lima and Merrijig	1885	14
Tchirree Timber Reserve	1885	15, 16
Barp and Archdale	1885	17
Gre Gre Timber Reserve	1885	18
Bullarook	1885	19, 20
Bass River Reserve	1885	21, 22
Bullarook grazing areas	1885	23, 24
Gunbower State Forest	1885	25, 26
Barmah State Forest	n.d.	27
Nindoo & Coongulmerang	n.d.	28
Baw Baw	1888	n.p.
Ellinging and Noojee	1888	n.p.
Ironbark forests	1888	n.p.
Allambee	1888	n.p.
Mount Fatigue	1888	n.p.
Moliagul	1888	n.p.
Bunyip (Orde and Collins sawmills)	1888	n.p.
Daleynong, Boola Boloke & Kara Kara	1890	n.p.
St Arnaud	1890	n.p.
Knowsley	n.d.	n.p.
Tarrengower Maldon	1891	n.p.
Yellow Stringybark South Gippsland	1891	n.p.
Agnes River South Gippsland	1891	n.p.
Mount Beckwith	1891	n.p.

### Forest reports 1904-11 (unit 2)

The second volume contains copies of letters written by Blackburne during his second period of employment in the forests service and date from 1904 to 1911. These give valuable insights into the challenges of running a vast forest district containing some of the most degraded timber assets in the State of Victoria. They also provide a glimpse into the period 1907-11, for which most of the correspondence files were destroyed following the creation of the Forests Commission of Victoria in 1919.

The list of letters in the second volume is too long to reproduce in this newsletter, but a copy may be had on application to [peter@peterevans.com.au](mailto:peter@peterevans.com.au), also an Excel spreadsheet indexing the surviving 1907-19 files of the Victorian Department of Forests in VPRS 1472.



## KAURI GUM

By Peter Holzworth



Kauri gum of North Queensland is notorious for its use as a fire starter for boiling the "billy" for tea by bushmen in damp, misty conditions in the rainforests of the north. Old kauri pine trees (once

called *Agathis palmerstonii*,<sup>1</sup> now *Agathis robusta*), often exude an opaque gum at their bases. Chunks of this material ignite readily and can set your water boiling in no time.

In the Queensland Forestry Annual Report of 1946-47, it was recorded that, "125 tonnes (tons then) of kauri gum were harvested from Crown forests. In the following financial year the figure dropped to 45 tonnes and in 1948-49 the amount was only a little over 9 tonnes". There are no further entries in Forestry Annual Reports. It is assumed that the resource was exhausted. In other words, it was mined as a commercial resource after WWII.

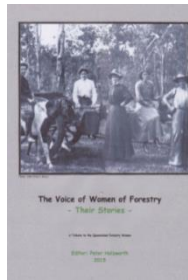
A Technical Museum report of those times mentioned that the product was "valuable for the manufacture of spirit varnishes and that the product had a good commercial future provided that regular supplies could be obtained".

In hindsight it's a pity that some archaeologists or museum people had not looked at the sites in those early days of mining the kauri gum. The material may have contained preserved insects, leaves, spiders and other small specimens of interest to the scientists of the day. I wonder if New Zealand had similar requirements for the use of this minor forest product?

## REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

We've received the following query from John Taylor (a different one to "our" John T) who writes: "While researching my grandfather's history, I came across the Australian Forest History Society newsletter, and some mention of the Queensland Pine Company sawmill at Yarraman Creek (issue no. 55, May 2010). My grandfather, Walter William Taylor, had been a marine engineer and after he married and settled in Brisbane, was employed as Engineer to the Yarraman sawmill in 1920. He died suddenly (at the age of 40) at work at the sawmill at lunchtime, on 16th January 1922, leaving his wife with two children, aged 7 and 5 (the latter being my father). His death certificate mentions as witnesses to his burial, the names George Meiklejohn and Arthur Keeble. I have found the name Keeble associated with the sawmill as an employee. My query is whether or not there are likely to be any records of the day to day running of the mill at the time of my grandfather's death in 1922, which may mention such an incident?" If you can help, please contact John at [bnjtaylor@bigpond.com](mailto:bnjtaylor@bigpond.com).

## NEW BOOKS & PUBLICATIONS



Peter Holzworth (ed.) 2015. *The Voice of Women of Forestry: their stories*. Brisbane. 136pp, illustrations, references. Available from: Peter Holzworth, \$30.00 plus \$10.00 postage. [p.holzy@bigpond.com](mailto:p.holzy@bigpond.com); 22 Ukamirra Court, FERNY HILLS QLD 4055; (07) 3851 1936

Review by Margaret Konald

There are hundreds of women over the last century who have contributed to forestry in Queensland yet their voices have seldom been heard. This book by AFHS member, Peter Holzworth, goes some way to addressing this imbalance and is an informative and delightful read.

Part 1, *Women of the Forests*, sets the scene globally from ancient times and is about women who spent time within the forests as legitimate hunters and gatherers, poachers, and those connected with folklore rituals, witchery, and burials. Part 2, *The Voice of Women of Forestry*, forms the bulk of the book and includes articles ranging from one about the timber-getting Lynch sisters of southern Queensland (featured on the cover), to women who are currently working in forestry in Queensland. There are also some interstate stories which add interest.

Sprinkled between the articles is poetry by Holzworth and interesting snippets entitled "Just a sec". Yet probably the real interest for the reader are the stories written by nearly forty women who, past and present, have had some connection with forests and forestry. Their brief from Holzworth was "to write something of their involvement in the art and science of growing forest trees and producing timber, or providing services to Forestry and related organisations". The women have approached their task with gusto.

With no thought to their own careers (women were forced to resign on marriage), some began their married life in tents in survey camps with their newly graduated (from ANU) forester husbands. They describe the challenges of raising children in very basic accommodation. Yet they recall fondly the "forestry family" in those bush towns, and of the camaraderie that was difficult to replicate when husbands were transferred to head office in Brisbane.

Articles by women who began life in the Forestry Department as typists are interesting vignettes of a different era. Not until 1982 did Queensland agree to appoint the state's first female forester. Her story is told. Showing the benefit of oral history, some articles have been produced with the assistance of interviews conducted in an AFHS oral history project in the 1990s.

The author is to be commended for focusing on this mostly ignored and overlooked topic and for producing another valuable publication from his 31 years experience working as a forester in Queensland.

<sup>1</sup> **Editor's note:** An entry in Wikipedia on *Agathis robusta* (citing Whitmore, TC, 1980. A monograph of *Agathis*. Pl. Syst. Evol. 135: 41-69) states that "*Agathis robusta* occurs in two localities, a southern population on Fraser Island and around Maryborough, and a northern population on the Atherton Tableland west of Cairns; the northern population was formerly distinguished as *Agathis palmerstonii*, but does not differ from the southern population and is no longer considered distinct."



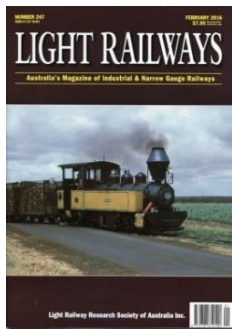
CFA Newsletter no. 72, March 2016. Commonwealth Forestry Association. ISSN 1750-6417.

The CFA publishes a quarterly newsletter and the March 2016 issue includes an article by Michael Bleby (AFHS member and CFA's Regional Co-ordinator for SE Asia and Pacific) who gives a positive

review of the AFHS conference at Mount Gambier (see pp11-12). There is much in this newsletter that would be of interest to AFHS members. It is available online at [https://issuu.com/cfa\\_newsletter/docs/cfa\\_newsletter\\_march\\_2016](https://issuu.com/cfa_newsletter/docs/cfa_newsletter_march_2016). Recommended.

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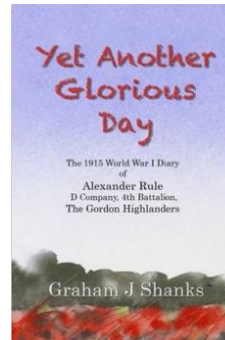
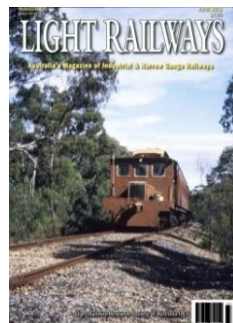
*Light Railways: Australia's Magazine of Industrial and Narrow Gauge Railways.* Light Railway Research Society of Victoria Inc. ISSN 0 727 8101. Available from [www.lrrsa.org.au](http://www.lrrsa.org.au).



The February 2016 issue (no. 247) has an extensive article by prolific author Mike McCarthy on Mason & Moore's sawmilling and tramway operations north of Port Welshpool in Gippsland, Victoria. The article documents Mason & Moore's promotion of Yellow Stringybark (*E. muelleriana*) as a suitable timber for wharf construction. The article is

well-supported by photographs and maps.

The April 2016 issue (no. 248) has an article by Robert McKillop on the recent destruction of the former Yarloop workshops of Millars Karri & Jarrah Ltd in the south west of WA. The extensive workshops operated from 1901 to 1978 and had been lovingly restored and maintained. Before its destruction by fire on Friday 7th January 2016, it was one of the world's premier industrial heritage sites (and one of the few such sites directly related to forest activities). Also of forest interest is a field report on the Taggerty Sawmilling Company / Bromfield & Gorman / Buxton Sawmilling Company mill sites and tramway networks near Buxton on the Black Range, Victoria, accompanied by site descriptions, field plans, maps and colour photographs. The field work was undertaken by Peter Evans, Scott Gould, Stefan Rebgetz, Colin Spencer and Stuart Thyer. This field report is another instalment in the post-2009 bushfire survey work undertaken by the LRRSA.



Graham J. Shanks 2015. *Yet Another Glorious Day: The 1915 war diary of Alexander Rule, D Company, 4 Battalion, the Gordon Highlanders.* ISBN-10: 0993441505

ISBN-13: 978-0993441509.

Available from Graham Shanks [gishanks@btinternet.com](mailto:gishanks@btinternet.com) - payment by PayPal.

Review by Rob Youl

This recent book, compiled by Graham J Shanks of Aberdeen in Scotland, lays out the experiences in France in 1915 of Private Alexander Rule of the Gordon Highlanders. Born in 1895, he was a student volunteer militiaman when war began, with his annual camp in August 1914 blending directly into full-time service. The book offers compelling reading, is well laid out and referenced, and fine for military buffs and general browsers alike.

The title "Yet Another Glorious Day" is drawn from Rule's most frequent description of the weather. His personal diary shows how Private Rule's teenage enthusiasm and excitement at reaching the Front change as the realities of seeing friends killed and the often harsh living conditions sink in. Yet it is not all doom and gloom. Visits to local cafés are numerous, mail arrives regularly, singsongs are frequent and there is tremendous camaraderie. This book enhances the transcript with accompanying illustrated notes, explanations and analysis, and will be of interest to all ages.

Alexander Rule was wounded in late 1915, and returned to the battlefields in early 1917. He survived the war as a captain in the Gordons in France (although his diaries post-1915 apparently did not), was awarded a Military Cross, and returned to Aberdeen University where he completed his MA and BSc (Forestry) in 1921. Forestry was in his blood - his father and grandfather were both estate managers in north-east Scotland. From 1923-37, after working in Perth for WA's state forests department, he lectured at the Australian Forestry School, was closely involved in the 1928 Empire Forestry Conference, and visited Canada. He returned to Britain in 1937, re-enlisted when WWII broke out, and then, with his Australian wife, moved to Kenya to oversee wartime timber supplies. After the war he was a consultant in the UK, but in 1957 returned to Australia as technical assistant to the Director of the Commonwealth Forestry and Timber Bureau, retiring around 1960. He published *Forests of Australia* in 1967. In due course he returned to Aberdeenshire, where he died in 1983.