

## Day Excursion To Urlingford Forest

(REPORT BY O. GRANT)

THE Society of Irish Foresters, in conjunction with the Kilkenny Archaeological Society, paid a visit to Urlingford Forest on Sunday, 9th October. Mr. O'Leary, District Forest Officer, on behalf of the Minister for Lands, welcomed the party of over 70. The Archaeological Society was captained by Mr. Hubert Butler.

At 1.30 we moved off through the forest. The gathering clouds which earlier had seemed to promise ill weather dispersed. Our way was along a forest road, bordered to right with 12-year-old Spruce and Oak plantations and to left with mixtures of S.P., Larch and Oak of similar age. A nearby group of Oak, planted at a spacing of 18 inches in a matrix of Scots Pine at 5' x 5', was then examined.

Moving on, we left the bright sunlight to enter the trellis-like shade of an old hardwood block of Beech, Oak and Ash, some 150 years old. The block had been worked by the former owner under the Selection System and promising groups of naturally regenerated Beech were visible on all sides. After heavy opening out two-year-old Oak had been interplanted at 3' x 3'. In one corner a truly noble oak stood. With a girth of 9 feet 8 inches over bark at eye level, the tall, symmetrical bole, over fifty feet in height, of even taper and flawless form, reared itself aloft like a Roman column.

After lunch in the forest nursery Mr. H. M. FitzPatrick spoke on the Selection System of forest management as opposed to the system of high forest with clear felling and replanting. Mr. FitzPatrick skilfully restated the arguments, pro Selection System of Mr. Ponsonby and pro High Forest of Mr. A. C. Forbes, in their controversy of 1933. Mr. O'Beirne followed with a short talk on the strip method of natural regeneration.

Resuming, we visited a pure Scots Pine wood, twenty-eight years old, on wet Molinia peat over marl. The growth of this stand in recent years had not been satisfactory; bark beetles and Pine Shoot beetles had been busy. Mr. Mooney explained that the drains had just been deepened and extended and it was hoped that the stand would benefit considerably by the reduction in the level of the water table. Sickly trees were also being removed.

Next we followed the Serpentine Avenue, which twists through mixed stands of Birch, Ash and Oak with Sitka Spruce underwood. The Sitka suffered severe frost damage in May, 1943. Only some of the injured trees were showing signs of recovery. The stands were a good illustration of the vulnerability of Sitka to frost when planted at low elevations in the Midland Plain. Though well over fifteen feet in height and sheltered by the overwood, they had been burned from tip to lowest branch. Mr. Mooney initiated a lively debate on their probable future. Mr. Clear treated of the use to which Birch is put in Sweden for plywood production, and Mr. McEvoy spoke on the possibility of establishing such species as *Abies Grandis*.

We next visited an experimental plot on which, in 1943-'44 Huffel's system of "Futaie Claire," or method of conversion of coppice with standards to irregular broadleaved high forest by selection, was initiated. The area, two acres in all, had originally been stocked with a dense crop of Ash, Birch and Alder, twenty feet in height and of an average quarter girth breast height of  $4\frac{1}{2}$ ". A profuse growth of Hazel covered the ground beneath the trees. In November, 1942, a heavy opening out was made, leaving only promising standards. These were left evenly distributed over the area, 229 of them in all, comprising 91 Ash, 96 Birch and 42 Alder. The Hazel was completely cut out and, together with the debris left from the thinning, was piled about the lower stems of the selected trees. In March, 1943, interplanting with Norway Spruce, Scots Pine and Beech took place. The Beech and Scots Pine were mixed fifty-fifty on the drier banks and the Norway Spruce was planted pure elsewhere. In all, 400 trees to the acre were planted at a spacing of 5' x 5'. The selected stems were seen to be developing fair crowns, and the underplanted species were coming away well. Furthermore, the high heaps of debris which had skirted every tree of the overwood were perceived to have practically disappeared.

To conclude our itinerary, we visited a stand of Jap. Larch which had been heavily thinned during the past eight years. The trees had developed good spreading crowns and were rapidly putting on increment. The stand was sheltered by a Douglas Fir screen. Intermixed with the Douglas Fir were some fine stems of Silver, which were forging ahead at a rapid rate. This closely spaced Douglas screen was achieving a cleaning of the Silver Fir stems, while, at the same time, serving to protect the Jap. Larch wood.

Before dispersal we inspected the ruins of Kilcooley Abbey,