

## Excursion to Athy

Report by W. SHINE.

ON Saturday the 13th October 1951 occurred one of the most interesting and enjoyable of our short excursions when our Society visited the Wallboard factory at Athy at the invitation of the Irish Wallboard Co. Ltd.

Mr. Shackleton accompanied by the senior members of his staff received the Society on the factory grounds. Each member was given a typed hand-out explaining the various processes in the manufacture of wallboard. Then the party was organised into small groups and shown over the factory.

It is interesting to know that wallboard manufacture was started on 15th May 1951 when the Bowater Corporation purchased a controlling interest in the Company which had been successfully manufacturing strawboard since 1949. Inadequate supplies of straw sounded the death knell of that industry.

The turnover to Wallboard manufacture was far-sighted, enterprising, and courageous and to-day this factory employing 180 men and with machinery worth more than £500,000 is producing 150 tons of wallboard per week; the Company hopes to reach the 200 ton mark shortly. With an English export market and an ever increasing home demand the company has every reason to be optimistic and proud of its achievements so far.

The first casual glance around the factory was one of amazement at the enormous quantity of logs stacked so neatly in the factory yard. Equally surprising was the speed and efficiency with which the logs were converted into chips in the chipper machine and then conveyed by a belt arrangement into the factory proper where the process really commenced.

Inside the factory members showed great interest in the very up-to-date machinery which pulped, churned, rolled and in a relatively short space of time turned out beautifully polished wallboard. The efficiency and meticulousness with which samples were tested in the laboratory was noted with admiration and it was not surprising that wallboard is becoming more popular every day. It was evident to all that a uniformly high quality board must result when such careful checking is carried out.

It was interesting to learn that a wide range of species can be used in the process. The following classification indicates the relative importance and suitability of the various species used :—

*CLASS A.*—(Can be used 100% for Board manufacture)

Sitka and Norway Spruce, Douglas and Silver Fir, Scots, Austrian and Corsican Pine, European and Japanese Larch, Willow, Aspen, Poplar.

*CLASS B.*—(Can be used 50% with Class A.)

Alder.

*CLASSES C & D.*—(Can be used 25% with Class A.)

Sycamore, Ash, Beech and Birch.

The wood should be fresh, sound, free of all rot and reasonably straight, knots, limbs and irregularities must be trimmed off and the logs cut squarely at the ends. The logs must not be shorter than  $3\frac{1}{2}$  feet nor longer than 15 feet while the diameter must not exceed 7" nor be less than 2".

The Company pays the following prices per ton for material delivered to the mill:—

£4	0s.	0d.	for distance up to 60 miles.
£4	5s.	0d.	„ „ 60/80 miles.
£4	10s.	0d.	„ „ over 80 miles.

The significance of the above details was not lost on the members and the far reaching effects of this bold venture were the subject of lively discussion. Its revolutionary effect on forest economics was fully appreciated and it was clear to all that because coarse timber and small thinnings were eminently suitable the stock of commercial timber in the country would not be adversely affected, in fact it would be conserved to a certain degree. It was fully realised that a steady market for forest thinnings had at last been established. In addition many labour shortage problems have been solved in remote forests since the Wallboard Company has undertaken the felling and extraction of thinnings. It was particularly gratifying to the foresters, the growers of the raw material, to see that such a beautifully finished product could be produced from the hitherto almost unsaleable small thinnings. They realised that this closer utilisation of timber would have the effect of increasing the value of our young plantations and poor quality old plantations as well as the low quality class sites generally.

These and many other aspects were discussed enthusiastically and it was heartening to hear that forest thinnings are ideal for the process. It was satisfactory also to hear that the factory uses 40 tons of turf daily in the huge steam boilers and the employment created indirectly must be considerable on this account.

The factory staff entertained the members to tea in Bradbury's Cafe in Athy when the tour of the factory had ended. The gay spirit which pervaded the tour generally heightened as the crowd mingled freely, chatted gaily and renewed old friendships at the running buffet.

After the pleasant meal Mr. McEvoy thanked the Factory Officials on behalf of the Society for their kindness in providing such an interesting and well-organised excursion. Mr. Shackleton replying on behalf of the firm stated that it was a pleasure to meet such an enthusiastic body and to note the interest shown in all that had happened.

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