

Excursion to Pakenham Hall

THE Society met on Sunday the 16th of September for its September session at Pakenham Hall. A rather small gathering had a most pleasant and instructive tour of the estate.

We were received at the house by Mr. Thomas Pakenham, who first showed us an old map of the estate dating from 1894 and then briefly outlined the history of the estate from its start in the 16th century up to modern times. Professor Clear, the leader for the day, then brought us up to date on the programme of reafforestation that had taken place since 1950. He told us that at that time he drew up a

preliminary working plan which envisaged a planting programme of 10 acres and a felling programme of approximately 10 acres *per annum*. The main emphasis was on the fact that felling should be delayed in the more densely stocked areas so that the age gap between the newly planted areas and the mature timber would be eventually evened out.

We learned that here we had to deal with two menaces, rampant and ever spreading laurel, and frost. Only the spruce had successfully checked the laurel, but in its early years, the spruce itself, if not killed, was severely set back by the frost. To such an extent was frost a menace that very often there was the temptation to plant Scots pine instead. The result of this was that though the pine grew well in its early years, it could never cast enough shade to suppress the laurel and the end product was Scots pine growing in a mass of 20 ft. high inaccessible laurel.

This we were told was the scene which presented itself when plantings were first started and naturally the cost of clearing was very high. It was found, however, that, very often, after they had cleared an area, the timber crop revealed, paid for the clearing.

We started out on the tour and saw as we went along the trojan work that had already been done. Of the plantations laid down since 1951 Norway spruce was doing best, with Sitka spruce which showed signs of repeated singeing from frost but yet had a vigorous glaucous look coming away well in places. We saw that in the low lying areas growth was very slow, whereas on the rises the plantation had very often got above the frost limit. The Scots pine was pushing up vigorously but one could see that the laurel was already getting a grip underneath.

Our next stop was under hardwoods where the crop was mixed beech, oak with scattered conifers. Professor Clear told us that, though natural regeneration was good, there were problems associated with this type of forestry in Ireland, in that the labour available lacked the time and skill to tend to the young crop and the Forestry Division did not recognise this form of forestry as being eligible for a grant. It was hoped here to encourage the natural regeneration and to introduce a proportion of shade bearing conifers.

We moved on into a 30 year old plantation of Norway spruce and Sitka spruce planted in two distinct blocks. It was interesting to note the difference in stocking and size of tree between the two sections. The Norway spruce were more heavily stocked but were smaller trees. The Sitka spruce obviously showed that some agent, presumably frost, had depleted its ranks, yet the trees that remained were fine specimens.

The last point of interest was the park land oak. There, Professor Clear told us that the oak, which he had calculated was putting on an increment of 15/- to £1 *per annum* was, as a result of a grass land improvement scheme, being felled out in the name of good management and progress. He showed us an example of the progress where the oak had been removed. The scene, as a result of the change in

environment and excess water, was one of a desolation of thistles and rush. This desolation was in complete contrast to the adjoining area where "the old law" still prevailed and grasses flourished in harmony with oak. A further calamity to be seen was where the trees on the fringes had, due to the change, sprouted epicormic branches thereby spoiling several veneer bowls.

After an excellent tea Mr. Swan thanked Mr. Pakenham for a most enjoyable tour.

M.J.S.
