

TWENTY-SECOND GENERAL REPORT OF THE MINISTRY
FOR AGRICULTURE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND,
YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH, 1963

Review of the Forestry Section.

Published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London. Price 5/6.

THERE are a total of nine-and-a-half pages of this 82-page report devoted to forestry, four of which comprise a detailed appendix analysing the acquisition and planting of land for forestry throughout Northern Ireland. From these four pages and the first two sections of the report one can match progress of acquisition with that of planting. With a planting programme of 5,000 acres per annum the existence of a plantable reserve of 29,809 acres shows that, up to the present, the purchase of land has kept a comfortable distance in advance of planting. At first glance the acquisition of 7,858 acres during the year suggests that the land market is still buoyant but it is to be appreciated that 2,836 acres were already in the possession of the Ministry so that, in fact, some 5,022 acres, or a mere 22 acres in excess of the programme were obtained. The Ministry expresses its fear that the problem of land acquisition is going to become more acute in the future.

Accepting that publicity is a form of education I find it interesting to note that, of the 19 sub-headings in the report, education, in one guise or another, is referred to in nine of them. Development of public interest in forestry was fostered by means of talks and exhibitions which totalled 34 in the year. Tree felling and fire-fighting competitions not only ensured a raising of the standard of work but also drew large audiences. A unique feature of education was the establishment of a small demonstration nursery at Pomeroy where, incidentally, a full programme of courses was maintained to include foremen, leading labourers, specialist operators plus refresher courses for foresters, District Forest Officers, school teachers, etc. The value of amenity forestry need hardly be stressed as a means towards useful publicity and increased appreciation of forestry by the public. In the United States and Canada the intangible benefits have long been appreciated and in Europe the pace is rapidly increasing to provide recreational facilities in the forests, which indeed contribute not only to the well-being of a nation but can be quite lucrative. In this respect Tollymore Forest Park attracted 26,792 visitors, a number of whom camped there.

The highest degree of public awareness of forestry is obviously gained by promoting the participation of the public in the planting of trees. To this end £10,000 were paid out in grants for the planting of nearly one million trees under three schemes which allowed for the planting of from 100 trees upwards. That a grant should be given for such a small number of trees indicates that state aid is available for the establishment of shelter belts, a most desirable association between forestry and agriculture. From an assessment of the figures

it would appear that approximately 450 acres were planted under the Planting Grant Scheme (i.e. where the unit for the grant was at least two acres). This is a healthy sign ensuring active participation of the people of Northern Ireland in the forestry programme and as a consequence a keen and probably gently competitive interest in the development of forestry and the marketing and utilisation of forest products.

Forestry operations have been improved by mechanisation, and of the machinery used the more intriguing are a "special swamp machine" and a 4-wheel drive tractor with large diameter wheels. Both vehicles assist in preparation of ground, from hauling and fertilising to ploughing and scrub cutting. Two 4-wheel drive articulated tractors were brought from the United States. These machines have a turning radius of 69 inches, can "operate under all ground conditions" and are equipped with logging arches. With such a high degree of versatility it should be most interesting to see them at work harvesting timber in dense stands.

Sales of forest produce in all classes from round timber to Christmas trees yielded the comfortable figure of £270,000. A feature that pleased me in relation to the sale of timber was the effort exerted to promote the use of post and rail fencing along road developments and it seems that now there are demonstration sections of this type of fencing in all countries; the results should be pleasing both financially from the forester's viewpoint and aesthetically from everybody's viewpoint.

But why was reference to the monetary angle restricted to the two figures quoted above? Even an outline table indicating in round figures the expenses involved in this well-rounded programme would do a great deal to tidy up the loose ends and complete the picture for us. This omission appears glaring in face of the wealth of figures quoted for grants, subsidies and costs in agriculture and horticulture embodied in the rest of the report.

L. U. G.