

Pomeroy Forestry School

By C. H. KERR, N.D.F. *

POMEROY House and Estate, extending to over 400 acres, was acquired by the Forestry Division of the Ministry of Agriculture in 1960 from Mrs. Alexander, widow of the late Major Alexander, M.C., who formerly resided there.

Pomeroy House is the original house of the Lowry family descended from the celebrated Lauries of Maxwelton in Scotland. It was built in 1765 by James Lowry, who at the time was Rector of Clougherney. However, in the main, the family had strong military and naval ties and was represented in all the 19th and 20th Century wars.

There is a strong tradition in the district that the stone for the building of the house was transported to the site by canal and traces of this are still visible.

The Forestry Division of the Ministry, since its inception in 1922, has acquired almost 130,000 acres of low value agricultural land for its afforestation programme. Like all other projects of a national character, forestry demands careful planning and there must be a definite target. This is to establish a minimum of 150,000 acres of productive forest as soon as possible. 75,000 acres of the acquired land have been planted to date and planting is proceeding at a peak figure of 5,000 acres per year. At June 1965 a labour force of almost 1,200 workers was employed.

Forestry is looked upon as a long term investment and it is considered important that all operations should be carried out efficiently to ensure a maximum return on the capital outlay. In recent years these operations have become more complicated, calling for the application of new methods and techniques. Since these operations depend to a very large extent on human labour, it was decided that an improvement in the skills of the labour force should be given a high priority. Therefore a training scheme, fitted to the Forestry Division's needs, was essential. Since forestry work is an outdoor occupation, training presents special difficulties. Unlike industry, where a labour force is concentrated within a limited space giving easy contact, forest labour is for the most part spread over the whole province and contact is therefore more difficult. This problem can be met either by having a regional training centre or by using a mobile instruction team. It was decided to adopt the first method, and because of this, Pomeroy House and Estate were acquired.

The location was central and two-thirds of the estate had been planted over the years with various tree species. Some of the arable land was found to be ideal for conversion into a Nursery where tree seeds could be sown and young trees transplanted. The House was

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sufficiently large and had the facilities to accommodate a resident course of fifteen members.

The School was opened in October, 1961, and since then has been fully used. The principal object of the school is to provide workers and Junior Supervisors with a basic knowledge of silviculture and a practical training in the proper care and use of tools and machines, the latest forest operational techniques and the important aspect of labour relations. The school has also been used to provide Refresher Courses for Forest and District Forest Officers. Short Courses have been given to private estate Foresters, Landowners, School Teachers, The Society for the Protection of the Countryside, and the Town and Country Planning Institute.

In the present Annual Programme four types of courses are organised :—

1. *Forest Workers and Junior Supervisors.*

About half of the year is spent on this type of course. It is voluntary and at no time is any worker compelled to attend. It is a three-week course with an interval of one month between each week's instruction. This is necessary because of domestic and other problems. Most workers are already well experienced and the aim is to marry this experience with the simple theory of forestry plus practical tuition.

The importance of safe working methods is stressed, as forest workers are exposed to hazards which do not exist in other branches of industry. This safety depends on the skill, experience and alertness of the worker and he has to be helped to acquire these qualifications.

2. *Foresters and District Forest Officers.*

This is a one-week course, so that this class of higher supervisor may be kept right up to date with current forest policy and techniques. Recent developments have highlighted the importance of intelligent supervision and much attention is given to ways of increasing the efficiency of this.

3. *Specialist Operators.*

This is a one-week course for lorry and tractor drivers, mobile and chain saw operators. They are taught how to maintain their machines and to use them in as safe a manner as possible. Mechanisation in forestry is reaching a high standard of development and the importance of the economic employment of all forest equipment is stressed.

Since the School opened there have been eighty-six courses for more than five-hundred forest workers. Almost a hundred Foresters came to thirty-four courses and there were four special courses for District



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Forest Officers. Two hundred specialist operators attended twenty-seven courses for different types of machine. Nineteen courses were organised for about two hundred people from various schools and societies.

Although it is difficult to make a material assessment of the benefits of the School over the past few years, there have already been signs of greater efficiency and lower costs, and an improvement in the quality of products. It has become evident that the social status of the forest worker has been raised, since he has shown standards of skill comparable with those in other more highly developed occupations.

The teaching staff, consisting of a Chief Instructor, Forester Instructor and a forest worker is assisted when necessary by specialist officers of the Forestry Division. Since all courses are resident, there is a domestic staff of four—three permanent and one temporary.

Pomeroy Forestry School is the first of its kind in the British Isles and it is expected that it will have a considerable and far-reaching influence on the outlook and efficiency of forestry in Northern Ireland.