

## Visit to Lough Fea Estate.

ON 28th May a small but representative cross-section of members spent a most enjoyable afternoon being taken round Lough Fea Estate in County Monaghan, by the owner Major J. Shirley. The afternoon was largely devoted to the problems facing an owner of a small property particularly where there was a desire to bring the woodland area into a state of maximum productivity. As a result the areas visited were all young plantations under 10 years of age.

The soils of the area are base rich and generally freely draining although they can be locally quite shallow. Many of the visitors were not particularly conversant with the problems of species selection, weed growth, etc., on soils including deep peat near the Lough with pH values of about 6.5. It was generally felt by the members that Scots pine and European larch, although they show early good growth, are not sufficiently productive and are too prone to disease for these generally good soils. On the other hand both Norway spruce and Douglas fir have been fairly extensively planted and have shown very good promise. There was some debate about which of these species should be planted; large Douglas fir poles presently provide a very remunerative market but young Douglas planted on the area are growing in a very twisted manner and are very prone to wind throw and need a lot of expense in staking and trying to firm them; Norway spruce is a more useful general purpose timber with a ready market for all sizes including thinnings. As both species should produce maximum mean annual increments of about 240 hoppus feet per acre on these soils the general consensus of opinion was that a matrix of Norway spruce with about 200 Douglas fir per acre interspersed to give a possible crop of 50 to 100 poles per acre should give the best financial returns on present market showing. Special attention can then be given to a limited number of the better Douglas fir to prepare them for the pole market.

Another of the problems facing an owner on this type of ground is the high cost of weeding and cleaning of coppice regrowth. All weeding on the Estate to date has been by hand but this year was

the first when they used 2, 4, 5-T on the stumps of areas which were cleared for replanting. There is no doubt the proper use of such sprays can considerably reduce these costs and it would probably pay Major Shirley to purchase an Arbogard or similar sprayer and do his weeding with paraquat or similar spray even though the total acreage to be weeded is small. It was stressed that care needs to be taken with chemical treatment to compare the prices of various brands on the basis of active ingredient and not gallon of mixture, to do the weeding much earlier than would normally be done with hand work, and to use the lowest concentration which will give sufficient and not necessarily 100 per cent kill. To determine this requires a certain amount of local experimental work.

A further problem where small groups are being replanted and edges of older trees left to preserve the amenity is the time when these older trees should be removed. Although there may not be too great a likelihood of wind throw damage in this area it was generally considered preferable to remove the bigger and older trees as soon as the replanted crop had obtained the appearance of a forest and before it had got more than 30 ft. high. Smaller hardwood trees on the margin could, of course, be left without any trouble to the end of the conifer rotation.

A small stand of fast grown (for Ireland) poplar was seen on deep peat although it was noticeable that there was quite a falling off in growth as one got nearer the lake and the water table was obviously nearer the surface. This stand had been very carefully pruned every year with epicormics removed when necessary every month and this led to a discussion on the possible certification of such stands. Three suggestions were made (a) the Government should supply a certificate confirming the location, number of trees, size of trees and treatment, (b) photographic records should be kept, or (c) the match manufacturers should be invited to inspect the stand and keep records themselves. It was agreed by all present that some form of certification of this nature was required if owners were going to be able to sell such produce at the best market price in future.

It is obvious Major Shirley has a very definite and specific plan of operation to bring the woodland into a largely conifer high yielding forest at least cost and to spread out this conversion over an approximate rotation. The Society must wish him well in this venture.

The visitors were entertained to tea and a conducted tour of the house with its many beautiful paintings and furniture and a very valuable library of Irish history.

W.J.