

Book Reviews

NORTHERN IRELAND FOREST SERVICE — A HISTORY
C. S. Kilpatrick. 1987. 98 pages. Soft back. B & W photos.
Price £3 sterling. Book may be purchased from Department of
Agriculture, Forest Service, Room 34 Dundonald House, Upper
Newtownards Road, Belfast BT4 3SB.

For a complete understanding of the development of forestry in Ireland since 1900 this book should be read in conjunction with one other — 'The Forests of Ireland' edited by Dr. N. O Carroll for the Society of Irish Foresters, 1984. Published by Turoe Press, Dublin. This latter book, based on observations and research over 80 years, draws into focus the silvicultural and growth conditions necessary to grow forests well on this island.

C. S. Kilpatrick's book on the other hand examines the discussions and policies that led to the formation and development of forestry in Northern Ireland. Leaving the statement like that, however, would not be fair to this book. There are fascinating accounts here of matters in the early years which influenced the thinking that brought the Forest Service in the south into existence.

The first three chapters are of particular importance in that they deal largely with the logic out of which both forest services were born. They peruse several of the more important land acts extant at the turn of the century which forced debate on the question of afforestation. One especially telling comment deserves a mention here. In 1900 Dr. Robert Cooper, a medical practitioner, gave a lecture in the Rotunda Rooms, Dublin, entitled "Ireland's real grievance, the deforestation of the country". He proposed a Forestry Department with a programme of two million acres of afforestation. He returned to the matter in 1903 when he gave a second lecture 'Treeless Ireland'. This lecture was given very broad support and on the strength of that support he quickly founded the Irish Forestry Society with himself as its first president. Since what is now the Forest Service in the south grew out of discussion in 1904 and out of the 1908 Committee on Irish Forestry and given that the Northern Ireland Forest Service came into existence in 1910 one cannot but conclude that the two forest services have a common origin and that Dr. Robert Cooper was, if not the founding father, then the catalyst of state forestry on this island.

The next five chapters swing away from any reference to forest development south of the border. They concentrate on the recruitment and the development of staff in the growing Ministry

of Agriculture (NI) – Forestry Branch. Ken Parkin, who took over duties in 1957 as Chief Forest Officer, receives a particularly glowing mention. He seems to have been especially keen on the value of forest recreation “as a haven of peace and tranquility from the pressures and stresses of modern society”. He also advocated Sitka spruce as the species for planting “the deepest of peats to the mountain tops”. Twenty oak trees planted inside the gates of Pomeroy Forestry School are an attestation to 20 years of service as Chief Forest Officer. He was a man indeed well liked.

A point of interest to readers of this journal is that during C.S. Kilpatrick’s presidency of the Society in 1966 the constitution was amended to make the organisation a truly all-Ireland society: a move that must be commended. While he was president it seems that C. S. Kilpatrick received a letter from India addressing him as ‘President of Ireland’: perhaps there are yet greater things in store for one of the past presidents of this society!

The final chapters of the book step us down from the high ambitions of the Forest Service (NI) into the now familiar contractions of state forest services ‘under the new economic stringencies that have overtaken all our forest ambitions of late.

In conclusion when I sat back, having read this book, the feeling that most strikingly came to me was the warm humanity and sense of purpose that seems to pervade the Northern Ireland Forest Service. Perhaps it is the nature of the job of forestry that this be so.

It is interesting to realise the parallel developments that have occurred in the maturation of the two state bodies into modern forest enterprises. Ultimately it will be this revelation that will make this book significant and indeed endearing to all foresters on this island.

Pat McCusker