

Mark Anderson – Scottish Forester¹

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If there is need to find an epithet to apply to Mark Loudon Anderson I am sure the one that is particularly apt, and which he would have approved, is "Scottish Forester." There was never any doubt of his being a Scot, sometimes in the extreme, and his concern for forestry can be called a passion.

Mark Anderson was born in April 1895 and died in September 1961, just four years before he was due to retire from Edinburgh University's Chair of Forestry. His father was the Parish Minister of Kinneff in the Mearns.

The young Mark suffered a double tragedy when only about twelve years old. His father, cycling downhill, was killed by being transfixed on the shaft of a cart. Six months later Mark's mother died. The orphan then went to the Manse at Menstrie at the foot of the Ochils, where his cousin was Minister – cousin by relationship but more like an uncle in age. It is probable that the five years Mark spent at Menstrie created in him an attitude which he was to carry with him, to a greater or lesser degree, all through life and which caused him to feel that some people were trying to do him down or thwart him. It was most unfortunate that he had this complex because it did tend to influence the way he treated some people who really deserved better for they would have been very co-operative if they had been given the chance. What brought about this was Mark's conviction that the Minister did not accord the same treatment to him as he did to his sons; and so Mark felt subordinated to them.

Mark left Alloa Academy in 1912 but with a grudge because he was sure that he should have done so as dux but was denied the honour allegedly by a master who had taken a dislike to him. He had intended studying Chemistry at Edinburgh University but enrolled in the B.Sc. (Forestry) degree course.

On leave from the army not long before the end of the war Mark married Mabel who came from Menstrie. There were two sons and a daughter of the marriage. Lt. Anderson was demobilised in December 1918 and convinced Mr Stebbing that he could complete the remaining year of his degree course

in the two terms that were left of the 1918-19 session. This he did successfully and on the fifth anniversary of graduating B.Sc. (Forestry) he added the D.Sc. for a thesis on tree form. He did it in the minimum time allowed for the higher degree and it was the first such award in Forestry.

Mark Anderson joined the newly created Forestry Commission and although he did some splendid work it did not bring the amount on happiness and satisfaction he should have enjoyed. The two principal reasons were the frustrations he met by not being allowed to try out ideas he put forward, and his intolerance of some people, particularly some who were senior in rank. His ability and his vision made him a man before his time or, rather, in advance of many of his colleagues. He was a research officer but so often he felt he was denied a proper hearing, or his listeners failed to understand him because their attitudes were insufficiently scientific. He preached soil, nutrients and root systems but, to a certain extent, was ignored. He pioneered deep ploughing of peat at a time when it was fraught with even greater difficulties than are now experienced because in those days horse-power literally meant what it said. In the 1920s he tried hard to persuade the Forestry Commission to appoint a tree geneticist. It was more than 20 years later before such a post was created. On the matter of personalities it is no secret that Dr Anderson and the executive head of the Forestry Commission did not get on together. This was a very great pity, for both were eminent men but for different reasons. It would seem that Dr Anderson never missed a chance to disagree with Sir Roy Robinson or to be rude to him, directly or indirectly. Indeed, it was with some glee that Professor Anderson told me of an incident when he was watching cricket in the Parks at Oxford, Sir Roy, in passing, said, "I didn't know, Anderson, that you played this game." The rather biting reply was, "Yes, and the war game, too" – a somewhat unnecessary allusion to Sir Roy not having served in the armed forces in World War I. In retrospect, this was even more cruel, for Lord Robinson's only son was killed in World War II while serving with the Royal Air Force.

It was mainly as a result of feeling frustrated in the Forestry Commission by not being allowed to do more scientific work that caused Dr Anderson to resign in 1932 and go to the Republic of Ireland, first as Chief Forestry Inspector and then in 1940 he became Director. It seems that this was a happy period in his life as he had the opportunity to use his initiative. It was his intention when World War II broke out to return to Britain to join up. Whatever upset this plan is not known because he did not take up his appointment as Demonstrator in the Department of Forestry of Oxford University until 1st December, 1946. He remained at Oxford until 1951 when he succeeded Professor E. P. Stebbing in the Chair of Forestry at Edinburgh University. He occupied this post with distinction until his death ten years later.

Professor Anderson encouraged research studies in shelter, climatology,

soil microfauna and investigations into the natural oak woodlands and he instituted experiments connected with the transformation of regular to irregular high forest, associated with the Check Method management. In a later period, the transition of the Department of Forestry to the wider scope conferred on it as the Department of Forestry and Natural Resources was made easy because of the standard to which it had been brought under Professor Anderson's regime.

Professor Anderson's students had two different views on his qualities as a teacher. They found him a poor lecturer because he read his lecture with bowed head and when he used the blackboard the writing was so small and lightly done that it was difficult to read. In addition, the lecture was rather concentrated and read fast. When a member of his staff mentioned to Professor Anderson that his students found some difficulty in getting down his lectures, he replied, "It doesn't matter as it is all in the books" – which was not so! On the other hand, Professor Anderson's students very much appreciated him as a teacher in the forest. In a very easy, natural way he became the great teacher through whom students learnt to observe, make logical deductions based on observation and their own learning and only then try to come to a decision. As a teacher in the forest he was at his ease and was an inspiration to all who accompanied him.

It was a self-appointed mission to try to raise the standard of British forestry that led Professor Anderson into other things. He was the initiator of a meeting held in Aberdeen in 1925, called to consider his proposal to institute a forum in Scotland where scientific forestry could be discussed. The outcome went beyond his original idea for it was the birth of the Society of Foresters of Great Britain, now the Institute of Foresters. It was a great pity that Mark Anderson did not play the part in its activities that one would have expected of him and this lack of active participation was largely due to the membership being divided into two categories – and division in such a body was repugnant to him as his objective was equal status among all the members. Indeed, he was so antagonistic to the class of Fellow that he never aspired to it because he regarded it as an empty title, where elevation to it was essentially on a time basis and not necessarily on merit. In those days there can be no denying that Professor Anderson had good reason for such an attitude which was also shared by some other foresters until the Institute did impose more realistic qualifications connected with its Fellowship. It is sad that the Institute of Foresters never in his life-time officially recognised this forester, virtually its founder, who did contribute so much for the benefit of forestry and of foresters. The award of its medal was made posthumously – a tardy recognition.

A similar objective caused Professor Anderson to found the Silvicultural Group of the Royal Scottish Forestry Society 25 years ago. He hoped it would involve members in discussion of scientific forestry, and so the original membership was by his invitation. I am sure that if Professor

Anderson had lived to celebrate this, its silver jubilee, he would have been very satisfied with what the Group has achieved and is continuing to do.

Mark Anderson was concerned at the great dearth of English language authoritative books on forestry. From his own pen he produced *The Natural Woodlands of Britain and Ireland* (1932) and *The Selection of Tree Species: an ecological basis of site classification for conditions found in Great Britain and Ireland* (1950), with a second edition in (1961). He wrote numerous articles and pamphlets and was always willing to address meetings on forestry topics. Various people tried to persuade him to write a book on nursery practice and afforestation, but he declined saying that such a book would soon be out of date as continuous progress was being made in these techniques and much more would take place. But a major literary contribution that Mark Anderson did make to English speaking foresters was through his command of some European languages. He spoke excellent French and translated from German, Russian and Scandinavian texts. It is interesting to recall that he began to study Russian in the trenches in World War I. This rather typifies the man who was never idle. In one or two respects he was sometimes stubborn over his translations. For example, when it was pointed out to him that his English translation of Knuchel's book on management had no index, he said it did not matter because readers should be so conversant with the text that an index was unnecessary! When he gave me the proof copy of a translation from German to check, I had the nerve to point out that in some places the English text was cumbersome as it was more a transliteration than a translation. All I got was "That's what it is in the original"! So my attempt to try to have a long Germanic sentence split into short, neat English ones came to naught. I found this a very surprising attitude for a man whose spoken and written English was impeccable. However, English speaking foresters are grateful for Mark Anderson's translations which have provided for us such useful works as Tamm's *Northern Coniferous Forest Soils* (1950), Knuchel's *Planning and Control in the Managed Forest* (1953) and Köstler's *Silviculture* (1956). There are also many translations on a variety of subjects including litter decay, humus, root systems, nutrition, forest types, shelterbelts, group selection and *femelschlag* working and the check method of management.

There is also his monumental *A History of Scottish Forestry* which involved him in a great deal of work and was begun when he was at Oxford. Even in this his stubborn trait was shown in that he did not produce the kind of typescript that printers demand. He did all his own typing and was rather mean about it, leaving an inch or less for a left-hand margin and none at all on the right and often trying to squeeze in a word were it to involve leaving out the terminal letter! And only single spacing was ever used! Some of the material was obtained by spending many hours in the National Library of Scotland going through newspapers of the 18th and 19th centuries in particular. But with all the very numerous authorities quoted in

the text, Mark left his typescript with no list of references, thus involving the editor in a great amount of searching to trace them when it came to retyping and preparing the history for posthumous publication. Having failed to find a publisher himself, Mark felt it might never be published. The fact that it was published made it a sort of appropriate memorial for a man who devoted his life to forestry.

It may be asked “How was Mark Anderson regarded as a forester and what did he achieve?” He was certainly held in very high esteem by Continental foresters. In Belgium, Turner gave him a lot of credit for the method used there in the transformation of pure Norway spruce stands into mixed stands of Norway spruce – silver fir – beech. Mark Anderson was very much in harmony with the French in their practice of natural regeneration and in not being in too much of a hurry to achieve a worthwhile objective. He always wished he could have seen something of Swiss forestry take on in Britain in appropriate circumstances, particularly the selection system, *femelschlag* and the check method of management. His maxim was akin to “Study nature, follow her if you can, but guide her where need be and record what is done and achieved.” At the same time he realised that natural regeneration is not always possible, and so he conceived his spaced planted groups. In these he had an unalterable belief in small groups made up often of three or more species in pure cells, and he used the technique in transforming even-aged stands into uneven-aged ones. Some of the deficiencies in detail were seen by some of us when the method was put into practice in Glentress, Dalmeny and elsewhere but he would not deviate, and so it was not till after his death did we get the chance to vary the application by using larger groups, each containing one or two species, and without cellular structure. This modification was based on trying to visualise the ultimate structure of a group selection forest and to consider its management.

Unfortunately Professor Anderson was not appreciated as much as he might have been in British forestry. He disliked large areas of but a single species, especially when it was an exotic, and he felt more use should have been made of indigenous or European species. His love of the oak was well known. He would have given greater application to the selection system as he felt there were quite a number of situations where this silvicultural system was more appropriate than some systems applied to pure even-aged forests. Thus Professor Anderson did not conform with what might be called the general practice of British forestry. However, he was appreciated by those who did share his friendship, by those who benefited from his teaching, whether this was in a direct or indirect form, and by those who met him as a fellow forester, especially in that environment he loved most – the forest. Indeed, it was in the forest that he was at his best and happiest. On the other hand, he too often plunged his knife into the Forestry Commission, and especially some of its officers. He had the true forester’s long view

whereas, in a general way, he felt that the Forestry Commission was too often short-sighted. There were times when he accused the Forestry Commission of not taking a firm enough stand, but Professor Anderson would not make any allowance for the over-riding influence of politicians. He did not believe in compromise but perhaps he might have achieved more had he departed, even slightly, from what was a firmly entrenched attitude.

Some of you knew Mark Anderson to a greater or lesser degree. Others know him only by name and reputation. I am most grateful that I was able to spend quite a lot of time in his company during the last seven years of his life. During that time I think I obtained quite a good understanding of the man. I certainly benefited from my fairly close association with him. Mark was probably at his best in small company because he was really a shy man and abhorred formal occasions, particularly when they involved large gatherings. He was a man who, although respectful to people, made no attempt at class distinction. Punctuality was one of his obvious characteristics. He led a very simple life, almost a frugal one. His creature comforts were very few and could be fairly described as only the essentials. He worked himself hard and probably did not properly heed his heart attack, with its first warning during a tour of French forests in April 1955, and so he died early. He was a staunch Scot and a passionate forester and so I learnt much from him about Scotland and forestry. He did try to help people but he would not tolerate slackers and those who were incompetent. In his inaugural professorial address he mentioned "efficiency, ability and integrity," and these are three attributes which, combined, describe Mark Anderson, Scottish Forester.