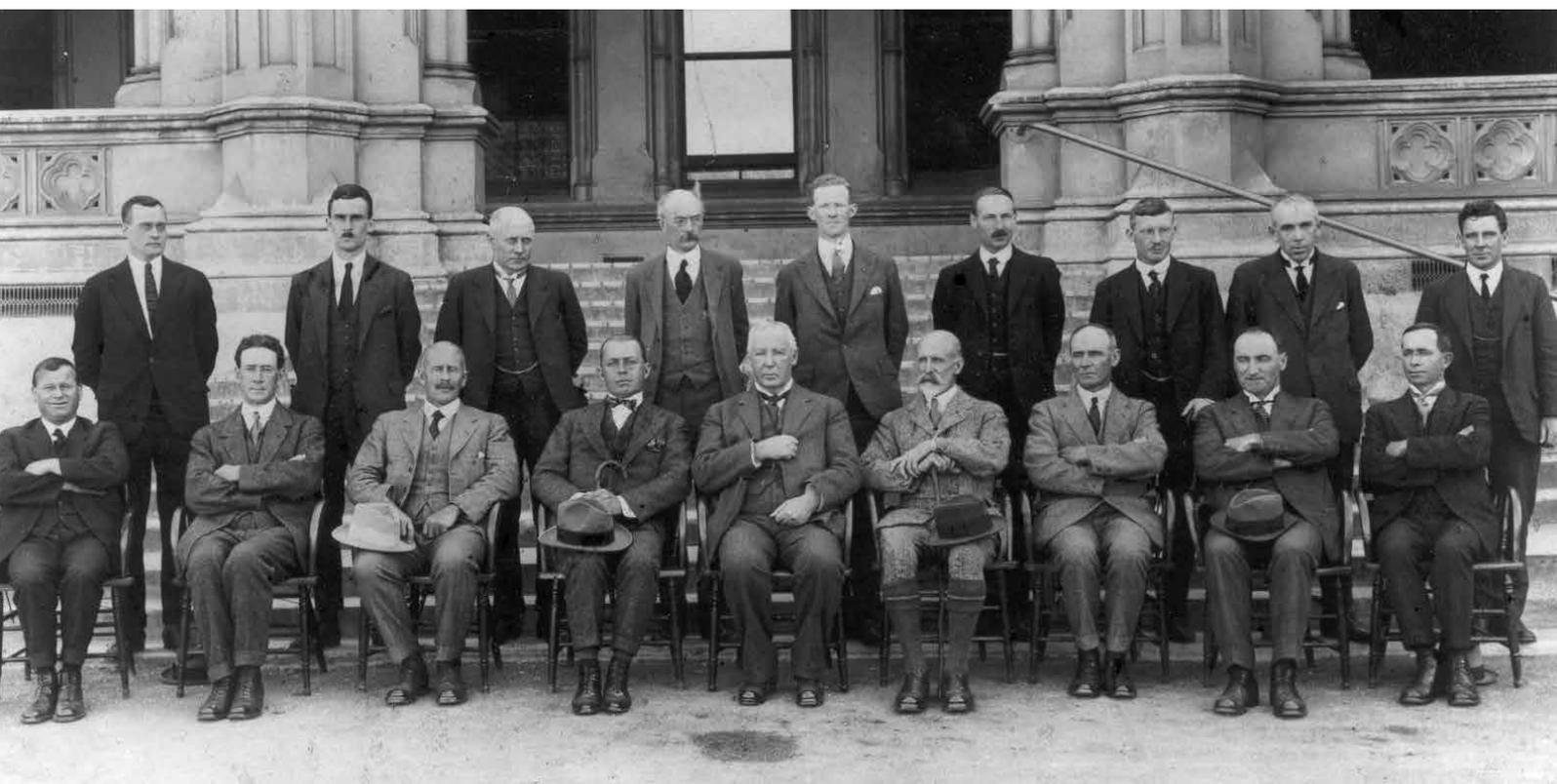


2021 – another New Zealand forestry centenary

Michael Roche



Sir Francis Bell, front centre, flanked by Ellis (left) and Phillips Turner (right) and the officers of the State Forest Service in 1921

Choose your anniversary

On 24 September 2019, the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the New Zealand Forest Service was marked at Parliament with speeches and presentations (Golding, 2019). A year before (in 2018) Te Uru Rākau Forestry New Zealand was established to ‘strengthen and grow the forestry sector in New Zealand.’ This in itself signals that the existence of state forestry agencies has not been unbroken, nor has their purpose been unchanging. Consider also the disestablishment of the New Zealand Forest Service in 1987 to make way for a Ministry of Forestry, a Department of Conservation and a Forestry Corporation (of which only the Department of Conservation remains in 2021).

In many ways 2019 was a good year to celebrate the 100th anniversary of forestry in New Zealand. It marks the point at which forestry was administratively separated from the Lands Department, with Edward Phillips Turner appointed as Chief Officer. In his first and only annual report he indicated that the

position of Director of Forests had been advertised in North America and the UK and that the 1908 Forest Act remained deficient in many ways. By 1920, the Director’s position had been filled and by 1921–22 a new Forests Act was in place.

Under this legislation a State Forest Service, replacing the short-lived Forest Department, came into being. Thus 2021, if rather hard on the heels of 2019, is another year in which the forestry sector can celebrate a centenary. Indeed, I would argue that in some ways 2021 marks a richer anniversary date. Whereas 1919 might be regarded as marking a beginning, 2021 coincides with the passage of a new Forestry Act, one that established the State Forest Service. Furthermore, it is the State Forest Service that managed the new tender system for standing indigenous forests and planned and implemented the 300,000 acre exotic afforestation boom in the mid-1920s. Many elements of state forestry in New Zealand carried on by the New Zealand Forest Service after 1949 can be sheeted back to the State Forest Service of 1921.

Origins of the State Forest Service

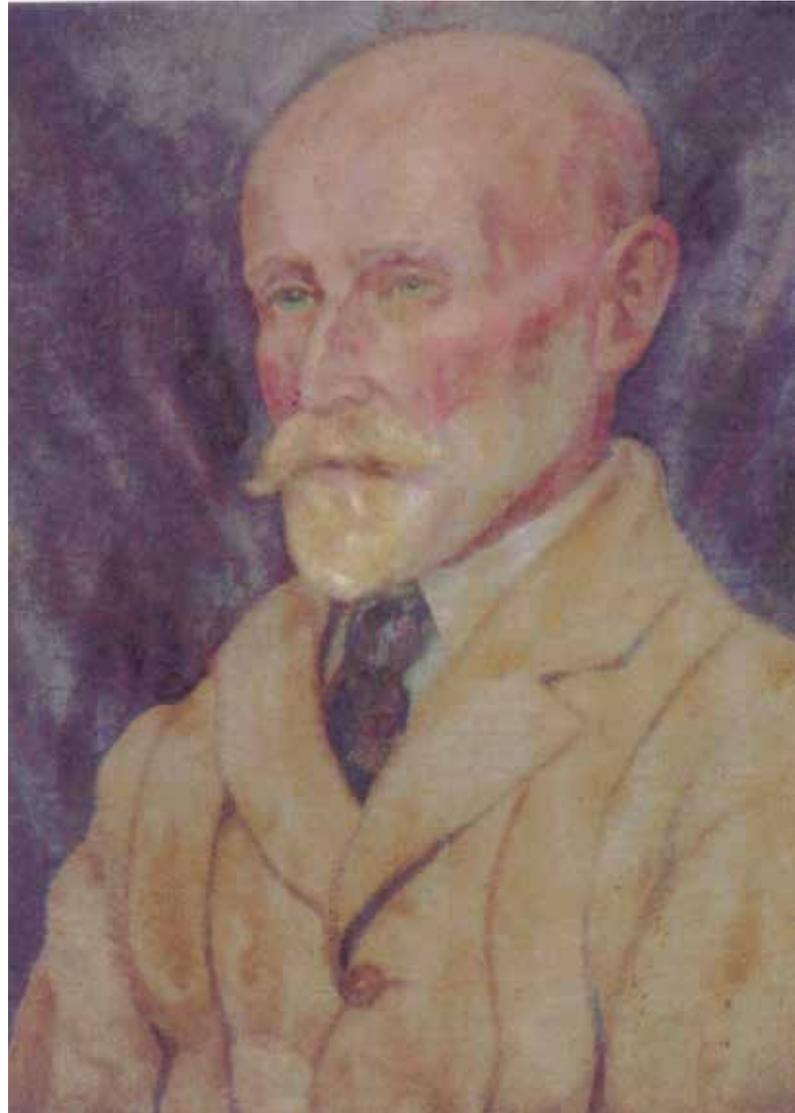
There were short-lived efforts to establish a Forestry Department in New Zealand in the 1870s and 1880s, but it was not until 1897 that a more enduring Forestry Branch of the Lands Department was set up in response to timber famine concerns raised at the 1896 Timber Conference. Despite its name, the branch was entirely concerned with afforestation activities, including some experiments with indigenous species. Official reports on the timber industry in 1905 and 1907 further raised the specter of a timber famine, which a Royal Commission on Forestry in 1913 put at 30 years hence, and they recommended (among other things) reserving forest land and expanding exotic afforestation efforts. WWI slowed progress, although Sir David Hutchins, a distinguished Imperial forester who reported on Australian forestry prior to being invited to New Zealand in 1915 to undertake similar investigations, kept forestry matters before officials and the public.

Phillips Turner was a surveyor by training, formerly Inspector of Scenic Reserves, an accomplished forest botanist, and effectively the sole self-taught advocate for scientific state forestry in the higher echelons of the public service. He had a powerful behind the scenes supporter in Sir James Wilson of Bulls, an influential farmer politician, and more publicly in Sir Francis Bell, a prominent lawyer, member of the Legislative Council and Prime Minister William Massey's senior ally. However, the scope of Bell's forestry concerns was originally limited to price and export controls. From 1918 to 1920, he had ministerial responsibility as the Commissioner of State Forests and ushered in the administrative independence of forestry from the Lands Department, laid out a new forest policy, and via the designation of provisional state forests moved large areas from Lands Department into Forest Service control.

A Director of Forests – Leon McIntosh Ellis

Among the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Forestry in 1913 was the appointment of a professionally qualified forester to head a new Forests Branch, then to be within the Lands Department. This measure was supported behind the scenes by Phillips Turner who also, having observed Hutchins at work in New Zealand, privately expressed the view that the appointee come from Australia or North America and not the British tropical forest services. There were 19 applicants.

The successful candidate was Leon McIntosh Ellis. Born in Canada in 1887, he had graduated in forestry from the University of Toronto, after which he worked in the forestry section of Canadian Pacific Railways. From 1916, he served in the Canadian forces, mostly with the Canadian Forestry Corps, rising to the rank of Captain (McKelvey, 1989). He remained in the UK post-war and was employed by the Board of Agriculture and the Forestry Commission. Ellis was interviewed in



Edward Phillips Turner, Secretary of Forests 1921–1928 and Director of Forests 1928–1932

London for the Director's position by a panel comprised of Lord Lovat (chair), R.L. (Roy) Robinson (an Australian Rhodes Scholar and Oxford forestry graduate), both later to chair the British Forestry Commission, and A.G. Herbert (New Zealand High Commission). The other shortlisted candidate, A.A. Dunbar Brander, was unable to delay his return to India so withdrew at the last minute. He had a solid if unspectacular professional career in India, but it is difficult to imagine that he would have had Ellis' impact in New Zealand.

The Forest Service was in many ways fortunate to secure Ellis as its first Director. He possessed great energy and enthusiasm and fully believed in the forestry principles he had been taught by Bernhard Fernow in Toronto, which was reinforced by his time in France and more limited forestry experience in Britain. He was also only 33 when he arrived in New Zealand to head a new department, but this was not exceptional. The Dominions of the British Empire were generally slow to embrace forestry and qualified candidates were all comparatively young. Owen Jones arrived as chair of the

Victorian Forestry Commission in 1920 aged 32 with seven years' experience in Ceylon, and 31-year-old C.E. Lane Poole, with 10 years' experience in South Africa and Sierra Leone, took up the position of Conservator of Forests in Western Australia in 1916. However, Ellis was coming to a public service where there was limited appreciation of forestry and professional qualifications were often subordinated to 'seniority'.

Ellis' 1920 report on forest conditions in NZ

Arriving in 19 March 1920 and working quickly Ellis inspected the forests of the Dominion and prepared a report for Bell as Commissioner of State Forests, which provided a summary of the 'forest conditions' and also laid out a 'forest policy'. In this Ellis proposed:

1. An effective Forest Act
2. A Forest Service
3. A fund for forest development and demarcation
4. The administration and management of all the Crown forests and forest lands by the Forest Service
5. A progressive timber sale policy
6. Facilities for technical forestry education
7. State co-operation in private tree-growing
8. Administration and management of all scenic reserves, national parks, forest reserves, forested national and educational endowments, and forested Native lands by the Forest Service
9. A Forest Products Laboratory for research
10. A survey and inventory of the forests, forest resources, and soils
11. An economic survey of the timber industry, and
12. The administration and protection of the fish, bird and game resources by the Forest Service.

Of these, 8) and 12) proved unachievable, 3) and 7) were problematic, and 6) proved surprisingly vexed. Some of his recommendations reflected his previous experience in Canada and Great Britain, for example, 8) and 12). Of interest a century on are the organisational models he proposed for the new State Forest Service.

Ellis identified these three organisational models:

- The first model had four tiers. The Director was responsible to the Minister in Charge. Under the Director was an Advisory Forest Board and a Secretary (records, fiscal, office administration), below that and directly responsible to the Director was the Chief Inspector, and underneath that seven 'conservation regions' each had their own staff
- The second model involved the creation of a forestry commission to 'control and administer the execution of forest policy', manage state forests and function as the 'competent forest authority' (AJHR C3A, 1920, 26). The commission would comprise

of the Minister, Director, Secretary of Forestry and representatives of the forest industry (he probably meant timber industry), consumers and labour. The Director would retain charge of all operations, with a Chief Inspector reporting directly to him and the Secretary retaining the administrative functions, as for the first model. Under these would be seven 'conservation regions' with their own staff

- The third model, adapted from that recommended by the Royal Commission on Forestry of 1913 was for an executive officer 'to be in complete control' (AJHR C3A, 1920, 26), but with an Advisory Board of experts, at least four in number.

Ellis' third model derived from the 1913 Royal Commission he included, perhaps strategically, to give a broader set of options, but there are subtle clues in his wording that he never entertained it as a serious alternative: 'an executive officer of approved administrative and financial ability to be in complete control' (AJHR C3A, 1920, 26). He himself did not meet these criteria, being unproven in the higher levels of public service administration. Besides, under this model forestry expertise was rendered almost incidental.

There is an echo here of the circumstances surrounding the restricted membership of the Royal Commission which included no foresters. Their Advisory Board proposal made some sense where there were enthusiasts but no experts, except for Sir Francis Bell, so it potentially represented a dilution of ministerial responsibility and control. Sir William Schlich, the doyen of Imperial forestry and Professor of Forestry at Oxford University, had earlier been critical of the Royal Commission's plan of an executive officer and an Advisory Board of experts. This opinion was available to local decision-makers, having been republished in the *New Zealand Journal of Science and Technology* in 1918:

This putting the cart before the horse; the arrangement should be the reverse. If justice is to be done to the work the executive head of the branch must be a high-class forestry expert, to be associated with an Advisory Board of, say, two officers of approved administrative ability. The board should be called together at stated times so as to bring the action of the executive officer into harmony with the general policy of the Lands Department

(Schlich, 1918, 203).

This left only two real options as far as Ellis was concerned. The forestry commission model, he observed, 'is working successfully in Great Britain, New Brunswick, several States of the United States, in Australia' (AJHR C3A, 1920, 26). Ellis himself had had some limited experience of the commission model in operation in Britain. In 1920, a forestry commission was set up in Victoria, chaired by Owen Jones, an Oxford trained forester. Suffice to say that Jones became disillusioned with the opposition that the commission faced from other government departments seeking to open land for settlement, with



Above left: Ellis, Kaingaroa c 1925. Right: Hansson studied forestry in his native Norway before working for Canadian pulp and paper companies, and completed a Master of Forestry degree at Yale before becoming Chief Inspector of Forests in the NZ State Forest Service in 1921

political criticism, and with the limited appreciation of the precepts and principles of scientific state forestry. So much so that in 1925 he came to New Zealand as forestry superintendent for New Zealand Perpetual Forests, the forerunner of New Zealand Forest Products. A case could be made that there would have been similar difficulties with a forestry commission model in New Zealand.

Ellis' first organisational plan was one that he observed had 'proven most successful' in France, Germany, Canada (including the Provinces of British Columbia and Quebec) and the US (AJHR C3A, 1920, 26). The Canadian scene would have been known to Ellis who also served in France in WWI. Further weight came from noting that Sir William Schlich had suggested a similar administrative structure for New Zealand. The point to note is that while Ellis may have later acted very boldly on afforestation, his recommendations for the organisation of the service were quite orthodox.

Ellis' recommendation was for the first model, not the forestry commission model, as in his view it secured 'a direct line of authority and responsibility from the Minister through the Director, right down to

the forest guard' (AJHR C3A, 1920, 27). Furthermore, in his view, it assured '*unity of control, direction, inspiration, and responsibility*' [italics in original] (AJHR C3A, 1920, 27). By implication, none of these might have prevailed under the commission model.

The model put forward by Ellis was accepted by Bell. It enabled him to combine Ellis' expertise with Phillips Turner's public service experience in a way that minimised any longer-term risk. Entrican (1996, 46), presented Bell and Ellis as complementing each other: Bell was 'a dour personality who spoke and acted with a grim conviction, Ellis was a colourful personality with great public appeal'; Bell was orthodox, Ellis unorthodox. There is something to this and Entrican was one of Ellis' first appointments in 1921, but Bell had relinquished his ministerial responsibilities for forestry in 1920 so the two did not work in tandem for long.

Perhaps more important is Bell's preference that Phillips Turner take the position of Secretary of Forestry, with Ellis being appointed directly by Cabinet on a three-year renewable contract. Phillips Turner was the most senior permanent officer in the service.

Essentially, he managed the administrative matters and day-to-day finances while Ellis was to develop and implement a forestry programme, with Arnold Hansson (as Chief Inspector) providing specialist technical assistance. This interlocking division of responsibilities was somewhat complicated. In practice, Hansson and Phillips Turner both saw themselves as second only to Ellis, but Bell specifically approved the plan.

Staffing

A new Forest Act came into law in 1921, which was another achievement for Ellis. Not that it was passed into law unaltered – clauses that would have designated unrevoked provisional state forests as permanent state forests were removed. The Act also provided for the establishment of a Forest Advisory Board to be comprised of State Forest Service and timber industry representatives and chaired by the Director of Forests. Ellis successfully delayed its establishment during his directorship – it would have made the implementation of controls over the timber industry more difficult and after 1928 there was little political will to invoke the clause.

In his first annual report dated 31 March 1921, Ellis laid out what had been accomplished. The State Forest Service now had 97 staff, 24 of these were at the Head Office in Wellington (of whom 12 had clerical responsibilities), and the rest were spread across seven 'forest conservation regions'. Of the latter, Rotorua (with 20 staff) and Canterbury-Otago (with 18) were the largest. Forest Ranger appointments were made for all regions, but financial difficulties delayed the appointment of Conservators to Wellington and Nelson-Marlborough. Ellis, and his Chief Inspector Arnold Hansson, possessed forestry qualifications. There were other specialist appointments such as Alex Entrican, a future Director of Forests (1939–1961) as Engineer in Forest Products, and Camille Malfroy as a milling expert.

Ellis also reported success in having the gradings and remuneration increased, but warned 'the state must be prepared – if it expects to have this high level [of performance] maintained – to pay for their devotion, loyalty, and efficiency just as commercial organizations must pay for it' (AJHR, 1921, C3, 3). This view was somewhat out of step with the ethos of the times. Ultimately, salary issues would be part of the reason why Ellis departed from the Director's position for the private sector in Australia in 1928.

Conclusion

Ellis' report on 'Forest Conditions in New Zealand' regularly employed italics for emphasis. For example, in discussing his 12-point plan of action he stated that the '*adoption of the principles involved should result in immediate increased forest revenue to the State*' (AJHR, 1920 C3A, 2). On the one hand, this shows his conviction,

but on the other it was overly exuberant and not the dispassionate language of other government reports of the time. Newspaper reportage about Ellis' 1920 report was largely factual, but generally supportive, but one wonders if the heads of other government departments may have been a little dismissive of him – possibly to their cost.

Some elements of Ellis' original vision for state forestry were never to be achieved. National parks and scenic reserves remained beyond State Forest Service control. Bell himself considered that it was impossible to hold the ministerial responsibility for both scenery preservation and state forestry. Wildlife also remained with Internal Affairs, although deer culling would for a time be part of the Forest Service portfolio. Some of Ellis' other concerns about forest grazing and forest fires did not translate that closely into the New Zealand setting.

In retrospect, it is clear that backed by effective legislation, and with an appropriate organisational structure and high quality appointees (even if few in number but with vision and energy) and bolstered by technical expertise, the State Forest Service was still able to achieve much in a short span of years. The Great Depression was not the trigger for an expanded afforestation programme, although this belief remains in the popular domain. Today's circumstances may be different and more pressing, but the early decades of the State Forest Service are a reminder that challenges can be met. Te Uru Rākau Forestry New Zealand could do worse than also mark this anniversary in 2021.

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Professor Michael Roche is based at the School of People, Environment and Planning at Massey University in Palmerston North. Email: m.m.roche@massey.ac.nz