

Society's precious artefacts digitised and preserved for posterity

By Tom Mitchell



Scottish Forestry has been published by the Society since 1948. However, our publishing history predates this somewhat, with the *Transactions of the Scottish Arboricultural Society* (later *Royal Arboricultural Society*) (*TRAS*) being published from 1856 until 1947. Members currently have access to copies of *Scottish Forestry* from 1972 to the present via the Society's website. We continue to work on processing of the 1947–1971 editions ready for uploading.

The Board of RSFS, at their February 2022 meeting, decided to appoint Automated Document Services Ltd (Auto Docs) of Glasgow to digitise the 60 volumes of *TRAS* published between 1856–1947, a small quantity of papers from 1914 relating to the Society's Diamond Jubilee, two volumes of bound excursion reports covering 1855–1860, and much of the

Society's pre-1970 photographic collection. The intention is twofold:

1. Create archival-quality, digitised copies of *TRAS* and the other documents
2. From these, produce web-quality copies that will be available to all members via the RSFS website.

The President of the Society, Simon MacGillivray, and I as Treasurer, visited Auto Docs in March to discuss the technical issues of the project – anorak stuff for we techies. Autodocs were selected for:

- their experience of serving an impressive client list including organisations such as Cambridge University, the Met Office, Calmac, the Forestry Commission and many others
- their capability in managing, handling and working with heritage books and documents, many dating back several hundred years
- the state-of-the-art equipment and software they employ.

During our meeting with the Sales Director, Pamela Tod, and Technical Director, Ewan Christie, Simon and I were also given a tour of Autodocs facilities. We watched Ewan prepare a volume of *TRAS* for test scanning. The system in use was an i2s A3/A2 Planetary Book Scanner, fitted with a motorised book cradle to provide support to fragile heritage specimens; Auto Docs also run A1 and A0 scanners too. One of the A0 scanners was used to demonstrate how our large-format photographs would be scanned. Indeed, the detail on the scanned image was better than on the original.

Simon noted that he 'was so im-



pressed with Ewan and Pamela and the lengths they went to so as to ensure that they could deliver our needs exactly', adding: 'The attention to detail was astounding in looking at questions that I had not even considered.'

Pamela added: 'Auto Docs were delighted to be appointed by the RSFS. Heritage digitisation is a specialism of Auto Docs, being well known as UK leaders in this sector. To be able to work on such a unique collection and support RSFS in this endeavour is a privilege and honour.'

Picture 1, opposite page, left: Comparing the original image against the scan to illustrate imperfections not visible on original.

Picture 2, opposite page, right: An i2s Copibook A3 Planetary Book Scanner showing a volume of *TRAS* on the motorised book cradle about to have the platen glass lowered onto it.

Picture 3, right: Technical Director Ewan Christie running a demonstration scan on the i2 CopiBook and checking the quality on the high resolution screen.



The process that the company will go through is involved. They will template the scanning and the post-scanning processing. This means that, once scanned, images will be de-skewed (i.e. straightened) and rendered at the correct resolution, individual pages will be stored as very high-resolution raw images for archiving, a very high-resolution PDF will be created, and a compressed PDF will be produced for publication on the web.

Quality is checked regularly using a high-resolution monitor (on the right of Picture 3) with the text shown at a high magnification to ensure that there is no 'fringing', i.e. where the edge of the text looks rough under magnification. The text at 500x magnification was crisp. I don't want to bore readers too much with the technical details, but the quality of the work being done is extraordinary. The care being taken with what are, to us, precious artefacts charting our

history and the history of forestry and land management in Scotland, gives us huge confidence in Autodocs.

Tests of the scanning of our photographic images resulted in some finely detailed digital images. This is due to the Society's photographers, throughout the 1890s–1950s, using high-end equipment and very fine-grain photographic film. Auto Docs were pleased with the quality of the starting product. Picture 1 shows one of our large-scale photographs pre-scanning, and the lower part shows post-scanning. The scan shows up imperfections (a scratch running diagonally across the subjects' eyelines) not visible on the original!

There are one or two other projects being planned around this work. For example, we are looking at ways of allowing members to search the journal online using keywords, and for specific articles to be returned from the search, rather than whole

editions of the journal.

We expect the scanning process to take a few weeks, and within three to five months we should be placing the first of the digitised versions of *TRAS* on the website.

Over the next few months, we would ask that you keep your eye on the website – www.rsfs.org.uk – for more information about this exciting resource coming on-stream. Members will need to log in to the site to get access to both *Transactions* and *Scottish Forestry*. If you can't remember your member login details, please contact webhelp@rsfs.org.uk.

RSFS members can now access a 50-year, searchable online archive of *Scottish Forestry* on the Society's website. Go to bit.ly/rsfs-arch and log in to view and search the archive.

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