

Foreword

De Tocqueville said that history is a gallery in which there are few originals and many copies. If the same can be said for forestry then 1951 to 1965 was a wholly original period in the history of the Uganda Forest Department. In many respects – enumeration and mapping of forests, development of silvicultural methods, regeneration of high forest and establishment of plantations – these 15 years were the high point of achievement of the Forest Department.

What made these years special? It was a time of relative stability and economic growth. Forest Department staff went about their business unhindered and, in contrast to much of the period since 1965, considerable funds were available over and above personal emoluments to invest in field operations. This stability and prosperity, when combined with the energies and talents of many committed individuals, fuelled a period of innovation and expansion.

Some of the difficulties and uncertainties described in this book are still faced by foresters in Uganda today. Encroachment and theft are persistent problems and demarcating boundaries to aid detection and control is as costly and logistically difficult today as it was 40 years ago. This book describes how a policy of devolution of local forest responsibilities was ‘pursued steadily from 1952 onwards’. Uganda is today again considering devolution of authority for forest management and there is clearly merit in trying to learn from the experiences of 50 years ago.

This book is full of detail, from the cost of road construction to the results of research. That so much of it is recorded here is a credit both to the professionalism of the Forest Department and to the persistence of George Webster and Henry Osmaston in tracking it down. They experienced and shaped these exciting years and have told this story well.

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