



# WOOD SCIENCE NEWSLETTER

March 1998

## FROM THE PRESIDENT

A lot is being written about the affect of 'globalisation' on the world economy, prompted by the collapse of currencies of the Far East Tiger Economies and potentially serious implications for the rest of the world. This is, of course, something that we have had to deal with in the timber industry for as long as timber has been traded internationally. Ease of product substitution by materials with similar characteristics from one country of supply to another has meant that currency movements and political factors rather than availability of the material have governed purchasing. This has been true with all the product sectors; hardwood, softwood and sheet materials. Charles Hopping demonstrated this in his Windsor Conference paper showing the cynical nature of the annual figures for different sources of softwood supply. This has been seen recently in the fall in Far Eastern plywood and hardwood prices and the knock-on effect of reduced Japanese demand on softwood prices. Most people would argue that globalisation has been a good thing by bringing to the market the most suitable materials at the least possible cost. But the supply position has changed noticeably over the past 20 years, with significant and increasing supplies of carcassing softwood and sheet materials coming from domestic sources. One must feel sympathy for the U.K. producers who have invested heavily in recent years and now find that market prices are suddenly sharply lower due to poor lending decisions by Banks in the Far East.

### What has globalisation do with the Institute ?

Clearly changing sources of supply require buyers and sellers to have the necessary technical product knowledge to assess similar, but different materials. Companies need staff with the Institute's qualifications, which demonstrate that this knowledge has been gained.

At a recent Council Meeting we discussed further 'globalisation' of the institute itself with the possible formation of new branches in South Africa and Canada. This exciting development would increase the scope of the Institute's influence and allow more use of our excellent courses.

We are looking further afield with the Dublin Conference now only days away. I would like to thank the members of the Irish Branch, particularly Jos Evertsen, for their work to date in organising both the Conference Day and the Study Tour and to thank our major sponsor Willamette Europe for their support. A very interesting list of speakers will talk on a wide range of subjects, but the theme will be to compare and contrast practises in the Tiger of the North with those in the U.K. The Lord mayor of Dublin will host the president's



*The President, Peter Latham, addressing the 1997 Conference Dinner at Windsor.*

reception and Hugh Byrne, the Minister of State with responsibility for forestry will open the Conference. I am sure that we are going to have a very interesting time and I hope that as many members as possible will attend.

*P. D. Latham MIWSc*

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National Conference - 2-4 April - Dublin

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# LIVERPOOL BRANCH CELEBRATE 40 YEARS

## Timber Town, a celebration

To celebrate the 40th Anniversary of the formation of the Liverpool Branch, Frank Latham has produced a history of both the Liverpool Branch of the IWSc and the Liverpool Timber Trade entitled "Timber Town". (This is available at £3 per copy including p&p from Geoff Bagnall (0151 724 1206). This neat little publication records the earliest imports of timber into the North West at Chester from the 12th Century onwards. Liverpool at that time was a small fishing village and it was not until the 15th Century after the River Dee at Chester became silted up that Liverpool gradually expanded its importing activities and during the next 200 years developed its activities so that in the 17th century timber importing and merchandising became the town's most important trade and today, of course, Liverpool is the second largest seaport in the United Kingdom. It was during the 18th century that the timber trade really came into prominence when in 1715 the Pool was filled in and the Old Dock was built. Prior to this, timber was landed on the beaches and it takes little imagination to picture the chaos that must have been created whilst unloading timber cargoes from high sided sailing vessels.

In 1785 the Kings and Queens docks were built and the Salthouse Dock was made available rent free for the timber trade and so the trade flourished. The Napoleonic wars hindered further expansion but when in 1815 steam was introduced and Napoleon Bonaparte took up enforced residence on the Island

of Elba, trade again prospered, and continued to do so, and by 1924 Liverpool was described as "the timber port of the world". It still is a port of significance despite the devastation caused by the bombing of the docks in the 2nd World War and the fluctuating trading conditions of the last few decades.

The Institute of Wood Science Limited was incorporated at London on the 8th December 1955 and one of the signatories to the Articles of Association was David Burdett Irvin of Forge Street, Derby Road, Liverpool, and it was he along with H. Jordan Craig, who were both members of the Liverpool Wood Club, who were the instigators in forming the Liverpool Branch.

The Secretary of the Liverpool Wood Club was instructed to contact all those likely to be interested in the purpose of the Institute, ie "to advance the scientific, technical, practical and general knowledge of persons interested in the study of wood and allied subjects", to which 31 replies were received. At a meeting held at the Liverpool Timber Trade Association on 13th February 1957 it was resolved to form a branch and to dissolve the Wood Club, and so the Institute of Wood Science Ltd, Liverpool and District Branch, came into being. Mr. Frank A. Latham (author of Timber Town) became the first Chairman, and the meeting resolved to hold five ordinary meetings and an annual dinner in the winter months and one or two outings of Timber Trade interest in the summer. Even today this

format is more or less followed with the annual dinner being the highlight of the branch's calendar. Of recent years joint meetings have been held with the Institute of Builders Merchants, the North West Area Board Association and the University of North Wales, and two seminars jointly with the North West Timber Trade Association in 1996 and 1997 all of which were most successful.

The Branch has always had a close association with the Liverpool Museum, the Merseyside County Museum and the Mersey Docks & Harbour Co which of course will long continue.

It is not surprising that Liverpool with its long history of timber importing and trading should be the home to the first branch of the IWSc., and David Irvin, along with his other founder members, can look back on forty years of unqualified success with great satisfaction and pride. *Editor.*



Unloading packaged softwood from Hoegh Mallard in 1966.  
The first Bulk Carrier to reach Merseyside.

## What's in a qualification?

What indeed! It's a question with two answers. literally, it is the demonstration of acquired knowledge; in the case of the Institute's qualifications, that its holder is well informed on the properties, processing, handling and use of timber and timber products. He, and she, can assert with justification, for the Institute's qualifications are demanding and not easily obtained, to an employer or other that they can bring a technical understanding and competence to work which involves timber and its products.

But there lies the rub! For there is a second answer to the question. What recognition is taken of such a qualification and particularly the Institute's qualifications by an employer or prospective employer? How often is it rewarded when it is obtained? Since their introduction 40 years ago, the Institute's qualifications have been awarded to many thousands who have demonstrated a knowledge and understanding of Timber. These people have contributed significantly and indeed enabled an industry to undergo more technological change in that time than occurred in the whole of its former existence. And yet now, when timber and timber products are under fiercer competition than ever from materials which are technologically advanced, demand for technical knowledge about timber appears minimal. At all levels, courses are poorly supported and only rarely are technical qualifications, the Institute's or others, asked for in a job advertisement.

Has the industry a death wish?

*John Brazier FIWSc  
Chairman Education Committee*

## Overseas Branches

The Membership Committee regularly looks into ways and means of promoting the Institute, not only within the United Kingdom but also overseas.

At the June Meeting last year, a list of countries was drawn up in which it was considered there would be potential for the establishment of local branches of the Institute. Initially New Zealand, Malaysia, South Africa and Canada were "targetted", being countries with an existing "core" of members.

The secret of success in such a venture is identifying a dedicated enthusiast who is able and prepared to undertake the groundwork. One such person is Don Priest, Fellow of this Institute and Manager of the South African Lumber Millers' Association's Sawmilling Training Centre at Sable in the former Transvaal.

He is in the process of contacting existing and potential members in southern Africa by letter. He has also written an article for inclusion in the leading South African specialist journal, Wood S.A.

The Committee is excited and much encouraged by these developments. Our grateful thanks are due to Don Priest and we wish him well in his endeavours.

Brian Norris is hoping to make some progress in Canada during a visit to Vancouver in June. We are still working on Malaysia. How about New Zealand? The benefits of membership of the institute are greatly enhanced by involvement in branch and other events such as the Annual Conference.

So, wherever in the world you may be reading this and feel that you can advance the cause of the Institute by the establishment of a local branch, please contact Brian Norris c/o the Institute at High Wycombe. You are assured of the enthusiastic support of the Membership Committee, the Council of Management and, as always, the Director and Secretariat.

*Brian Norris AIWSc,  
Chairman, Membership Committee.*

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# BRANCH LINES

## London

At the AGM Richard Murphy stepped down as chairman and Bryan Gauld was proposed and elected to take his place. Thank you very much Richard for all the energy and diplomatic charm you have put in to your long spell as chairman and of course for your congenial company. All the London Branch wish you well for your turn as President.

The Branch has not recovered from the death of its Secretary, Francis Bletchly who was such a valued member of the London Branch. We miss his erudition and breath of knowledge.

Our meetings started on the 7th October with a special seminar on 'Boron based wood preservatives'. This was in conjunction with the BWPDA and presented by Dr Jeff Lloyd from Borax who also sponsored the evening. There was a lively debate and a good attendance including a representative from the Architects, Sir Michael Hopkins and Partners, who like other architectural practices are very concerned about what preservatives to specify to maintain a sustainable planet. In November we had a successful joint meeting with the Chilterns Branch to the 'Griffin Brewery, Fuller Smith and Turner plc. Chiswick' and we were honoured with the President's company. We saw some interesting wooden casks and hoghead barrels as well as being royally entertained.

By the time this is read Peter Greenway will have given his talk on trading and markets in MDF. Our other meetings are a visit to Surrey University on the 10th March and a meeting at Imperial College on 12th May with a talk by Peter Latham.

*Bryan Gauld AIWSc Chairman.*

## Yorkshire

At the Branch AGM held in November, Alun Watkins and Mike Fenna were elected to continue as Secretary and Treasurer respectively. I also maintain position as Chairman of the Branch.

Last year saw the unofficial merger of the Yorkshire and Tyne Tees Branch and hopefully this strength in numbers will help to build on the success of 1997.

We also became more settled and held several meetings in Goole, at the home of the Yorkshire and Humberside Panel Products Association. The meetings had a strong marketing theme with excellent presentations and discussions from notable experts in this field.

A programme for the year is currently being arranged with the first meeting scheduled for May 5. We are also planning to visit the oldest brewery in Yorkshire which still employs its own full time staff of coopers!

I look forward to seeing all the usual faces at our gatherings and hopefully some new ones. If there are any particular topics that you would like to see covered in the programme, please let me know. We would also welcome some new blood to help with the management side of the branch. You really do get as much out, as you put in!

*Neil Ryan AIWSc Chairman.*

## Western Counties

The new season started with a visit to Structural Timbers at Whitchurch, near Bristol, hosted by Brian Thompson. A select group were shown the complete cycle for the production of glue-laminated beams and a high level of hospitality was very much appreciated. In October a group of about twenty members drove to CSC Forest Products Ltd. (Caberboard) located at Hill Village, South Molton, Devon to view the chipboard panel plant. The scale of the operation is astonishing and much of the output is faced with polymer coatings and some with veneer.

A high proportion of production is processed on site into finished flat pack components for items such as TV cabinets and furniture. In November a large group viewed the Gloucester Docks Waterways Museum where plenty of wood was in evidence in the canal exhibits. In 1998 we look forward to a tour of the new Johannes Klais organ recently installed in Bath Abbey and a trip to the Turland Joinery at Tewkesbury for a presentation on home grown timbers presented by Alexander Goldsworthy of Timber Pride

*M. Ansell FIWSc., Secretary.*

## Scotland

The Scottish Branch has had two meetings so far in its 97 / 98 season. Last October Malcolm Strong, founder of Strong Bridges, entertained us with his story of setting up a small manufacturing company around a novel design for a wooden bridge. From an idea thought up at Hooke Park, Malcolm has established a thriving business producing ornamental, but thoroughly functional bridges. Our second meeting moved to the other end of the construction industry and Paul Clark of Mitek demonstrated the 'Mitek 2000 Trussed Rafter Design Software'. A highly efficient and sophisticated software design package was shown to produce complex rafter designs in real time and with an enormous degree of flexibility.

Up and coming meetings include a discussion of the hardwood trade in the 21st Century with John Taylor of Pacific European Timber Agency Limited, which will include details of a timber seeking expedition into Bolivia (Wednesday 22nd April) and our Annual General Meeting at Discovery Point, Dundee, which will include a guided trip around the RRS Discovery whose renovation has recently been completed. All details of meetings are distributed to members around two weeks before the meeting date, if you are not receiving notification, or if it is going to the wrong address, please contact the branch chairman, John Palfreyman at the University of Abertay Dundee, telephone 01382 308657.

*J. Palfreyman FIWSc Chairman.*

## Midland

'The Renaissance of English Oak' was the title of a first class presentation by Roger Venables of Henry Venables Ltd., Stafford.

The content was centred around the renovation work following the fire at Windsor Castle. Excellent slides took us through all of the stages from the flames to the final opening by H.M. the Queen.

The intricacies of design and craftsmens skills were expertly explained and illustrated with practical samples of the mouldings and joints employed - a pleasure to look and touch!

The meeting was a joint affair with Midland architects on the premises of Newman Tonks, Birmingham Business Park who generously provided refreshments.

The attendance was over 50, but sadly the majority were architects and students from Warwick College, Leamington.

The committee would like to arrange further meetings if branch members would offer their support.

A brief phone call would be helpful in assessing viability and topics with possible speakers are also welcome - joint meetings with other interested groups offer further possibilities.

*Phone Tom Shaw - Chairman 01789 840 605 Dave Vincent - Secretary 0121 433 3440 or 0121 433 3476*

## Thames Valley and Chilterns

1997 ended with a trip with the London Branch around the Griffin Brewery in November. The trip was well attended and was an enjoyable afternoon. Followed in December by a series of talks about research in the Forest Products Research Centre at the Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College.

The start of 1998 saw an excellent talk about musical instruments in January, which illustrated the use of wood in the building of instruments, such as the cello and the violin. The evening ended with one of the speakers' instruments being played by a member of the local committee, also a Lute was played.

The most recent talk, in February, concerned the storage of archaeological wood from the Mary Rose and the passive conservation which was used, and the problems that they encountered. The talk was extremely interesting and informative. We hope that the rest of talks in 1998 are as interesting and as well attended

*Glynn Davis AIWSc*



# REVERSING THE DECLINE (Continued)

## Future expansion of Sherwood

Future expansion of the forest area is considered desirable for a range of different reasons, some of which attribute an additional value to the existing forest area.

**Conservation:** The ancient oak woodlands and heaths of Sherwood, and their associated flora and fauna, are recognised as being of national and international importance for conservation.

**Forestry:** Sherwood's plantations produce good quality timber close to ready markets, but the income this generates cannot compete with agriculture. There is no sound economic basis for tree planting as long as land prices are held up by the availability of farm-price supports.

Most recent plantings on farmland have been small scale either for aesthetic reasons alone, or perhaps to improve the shooting potential. There is no longer a tradition of woodland management, with many farmers and landowners neglecting the small woodlands on their land.

There is, however, a need to diversify agricultural business and provide rural employment. The redevelopment of small-scale productive management of farm woodlands could help to fill that need.

A series of statutory and non-statutory bodies has long held an interest in Sherwood, but those interests tended to run in parallel, often failing to

come together where they could achieve a greater impact.

The Sherwood initiative was set up by the Forestry Commission to bring about some convergence between those interests. This grew from the recognition that modern multi-purpose forestry could itself accommodate many of these pressures and that, consequently, an expansion of woodland in Sherwood would be desirable.

The culmination of this process was the formation of the Sherwood Forest Trust, a nonprofit body that helps identify opportunities to regenerate Sherwood and turn those opportunities into action.

We can maximise our impact by using our understanding of the complex ecological and economic relationships. Creating a new hectare of woodland or heathland on arable farmland is likely to be a standard cost across most of Sherwood. However, the benefits could vary enormously.

Excerpted from *Restoration of Forests: Environmental Challenges in Central & Eastern Europe*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Netherlands (1997).

The author directs the Forestry Commission of Great Britain's Sherwood Initiative in Nottinghamshire, United Kingdom. More information appears at <http://www.sherwoodforest.org.uk>

*Gordon Hewston is the project director of the Sherwood Forest trust and would welcome support from IWSc Members .  
Telephone 01623758231*



*Where others once rode.*

## Benefits to IWSc Members

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## Forest Education Initiative

Over the last few months there has been considerable discussion on how to integrate the requirements of educationalists with the facilities available from those involved in the forestry industries.

In December primary teachers were invited to an exhibition prepared by FEI members, unfortunately, although the exhibition covered a wide range of activities the teachers were not forthcoming.

The Thames and Chiltern Cluster would be pleased to increase the involvement of the Forest Products Industry, if you can make a contribution please let us know so that we can pass on your details.

**B. MATTHEWS FIWSc**

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It would be of enormous help if members would pay their annual subscription by direct debit.

If you would like to join those who already ease the administration costs by paying by direct debit then please phone the office.

Your co-operation would be much appreciated.

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# THE SHERWOOD FOREST - REVERSING THE DECLINE

By Austin Brady

*Sherwood Forest, because of its association with the Robin Hood legend, is probably the best known forest in the world.*

The real forest has been in decline for many years. The causes of its decline are outlined. The benefits of re-creating parts of the forest are explored. The development of a Trust to implement the restoration of the forest is described.

## Historical background

The existence of Sherwood Forest owes much to its underlying geology. Running through the heart of the country is a large sandstone feature known as the Sherwood or Bunter Sandstone. This area is characterised by poor and infertile sand soil, which holds little moisture.

As a result, large areas of Sherwood could not support permanent farming, and so a shifting cultivation resulted. Parts of the forest cleared for farming were later abandoned when their fertility dropped, or during periods of prolonged drought.

Abandoned farmland soon reverted to heathland and scrub and often back to woodland again. By the Norman era (mid 11th Century), Sherwood was a complex mosaic of woodland and open heathland with small areas of farming and settlement.

Throughout its recorded history, Sherwood has never been wall-to-wall trees. The Normans were fond of hunting, principally deer and wild boar. Large tracts of the countryside were identified as suitable for the hunt, and this often resulted in them being declared as Royal Forests.

Such a designation meant that permission was needed to carry out a range of farming and woodland management.

Many beams in the Lincoln Cathedral roof (dating from about 1250) came from Sherwood, and monks of Rufford Abbey were amongst those buying land from the King in the 14th Century, which they cleared of oaks and turned over to farming.

Large areas of the forest remained as open heathland or 'forest waste,' as it was called. This land did not always revert to woodland as it became managed for extensive grazing. Areas of bracken were cut for animal bedding and heather was cut for use as thatch on buildings.

For centuries, the extensive heathlands were the key component of the Sherwood countryside, linking together the woodlands, river valley pastures, farmsteads and settlements. As Sherwood emerged from the medieval period, the influences of Crown and church were diminishing. Land changed hands after the dissolution of the monasteries and a series of large, new Ducal estates were developed.

Large areas of Sherwood's wastes were transformed during the 18th and 19th centuries by new woodland planting, and the development of ornamental lakes and grand houses. The Dukeries estates retained elements of the semi-natural landscapes within their parklands, but also became the driving force for agricultural improvement and commercial activities.

Suddenly, by the late 18th Century, the pace of change in Sherwood had accelerated like never

before. The old economics of heathland management was gone, agriculture had to feed a growing population, and the rapid expansion of coal mining was being driven by industrialisation.

By the early 20th Century, most surviving heathland was turned over to agriculture and to the new economics of plantation forestry. Large areas of Sherwood's surviving ancient heaths were converted to conifer plantation forest. The surviving core of ancient Sherwood Forest at Birklands became a popular stop on the newly developing tourist trails. The forest was now truly fragmented like never before.

## Sherwood Forest Today

It is only within the last few decades that the postwar pressure for self-sufficiency in food production has eased. This allowed us the luxury of taking a fresh look at the countryside and has given us the opportunity to develop new priorities.

Since World War II, greater efforts have been made to identify and protect surviving examples of dwindling habitats or disappearing historic features. This created a process where different statutory bodies worked to protect or influence parts of the countryside for various reasons.

This narrowly focused approach continued apace for several decades. Great attention was paid to a few key sites, but little was done to influence what happened in the wider countryside.

A strategic approach linking conservation and protection with positive enhancement and management of the wider countryside is emerging. The boundaries between the areas of interest of a wide range of statutory bodies are beginning to blur.

Consider the modern landscape of Sherwood Forest. Fragments of the ancient forest and heath survive, more recent woodland has been planted on some old heaths, and large areas of land have been tipped on because of decades of deep coal mining. In addition, all of this is dominated by extensive arable farmland, which accentuates the fragmentation of the landscape.

The Sherwood countryside continues to be shaped by a whole series of economic and environmental pressures. Economics has been at the heart of landscape change within the forest for centuries.

There is little to be gained from trying to shelter Sherwood from economic reality, but a great deal to be gained by accounting for the benefits that the forest delivers.

It is most useful to look at the current and future economic and environmental factors at play in the forest area and to focus our efforts in two key areas: First, to maximise the generation of real income that can be redeployed within the forest and, second, to pursue opportunities to expand the forest area, achieving additional benefits valued and recognised by others.

## Plantations and ancient woodlands

There is no doubt that plantation forests in the Sherwood area are productive. Plantations of Corsica pine (*Pinus nigra larico*) are common, producing quality softwood for local and regional sawmills.

However, the plantation forest is also expected to provide benefits for the public in terms of an enhanced landscape, a wildlife habitat and a recreational resource.

This pursuit of multiple objectives is most apparent within the public-sector woodlands, where significant reductions in plantation area and adjustments of felling age are designed to improve the appearance and habitats of the forest.

Recent silvicultural practices following clear felling have allowed the dormant seed banks from Sherwood's ancient heathlands to regenerate over parts of the forest.

Within the plantations, a network of glades and permanent open heathlands, linked by corridors of managed roadside vegetation is not only ideal for habitat continuity, but also provides a mature and stable infrastructure for recreational use, which enhances the forest's aesthetic value.

As large areas of plantation neared the end of their rotation at the same time, felling has been staggered so that the forest is restructured across a wider range of age classes. This helps to achieve greater ecological stability, as every stage of plantation development is always present somewhere in the forest. Protecting and enhancing valued wild life habitats and providing recreational opportunities (walking, cycling, horse riding, etc.) are sufficient justifications



"Forest Waste" - Typical Sherwood Countryside

for the resulting reduction in potential timber income. However, the efficient management of the timber resource still provides the income that is the driving force for the whole forest management cycle.

**Ancient woods:** Broadleaved woodland in Sherwood Forest is dominated by areas of semi-natural and ancient woodland, which have long been managed for their aesthetic and heritage value. For poor sandy soils do not produce good quality hardwood timber, but are readily recolonised by the native oak and birch.

The surviving ancient woodland of Birklands, at the heart of Sherwood Forest, still contains several thousand ancient oaks, many in excess of 500 years old. Its association with the Robin Hood legend has long been a fascination with the public, and the site has been a popular place to visit. About one million people visit each year, and this has dominated the management of the site while posing a serious risk to its fragile ecosystem.

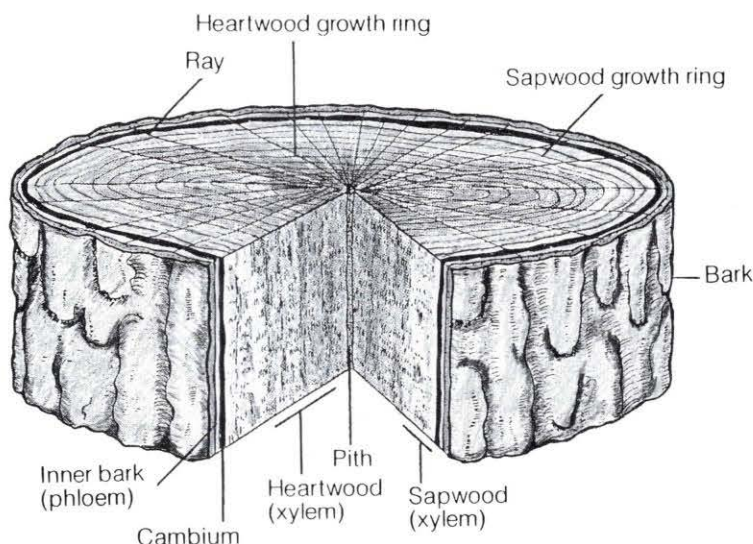
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# IT'S NOT A PIECE OF CAKE



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