

The *Dunse History Society* was much interested in a lecture entitled 'British Honduran Forestry Units in Duns during WW2' given by **Dr David Smale on 29th January**.

Following the outbreak of WW2 there was a substantial increase in the demand for timber coupled with a corresponding reduction of imported timber from shipping losses. To alleviate these problems workers with necessary skills were brought to the Borders to cut timber, including from Newfoundland and the British Honduras in Central America (now Belize). Initially 500 Hondurans arrived and were based across the Borders including the Castle estate.

The Hondurans were black and the issue of racism became evident. The Ministry of Supply gave them poorer living conditions and clothing and they were paid less than their white counterparts from other parts of the Empire. The Newfoundlanders could mix with the locals but not the Hondurans. There was also fear about the safety of white British women. The Duke of Buccleugh worked hard to keep them out of the Borders.

Nevertheless, they were seen by the locals as heroes who had come here to help the country and they found friends and visited local places. There were, of course, antisocial issues of drunkenness and fighting with locals, etc. although no worse than other forester unit staff. Nevertheless, the Hondurans were closely watched by the police and the issue of local girls and the Hondurans became a focus of their attention. White girls were in fact visiting the Honduran Duns camp and were staying nights. Three women were charged with trespass by the Duns Sheriff Court. By 1942 the police felt it necessary to act to remove the growing number of women (whose husbands were serving soldiers) from the camp. A raid on the huts by 60 policemen led to the arrest of 12 women and 2 children who were all found guilty of trespass and fined. A second police raid resulted in 2 women being jailed for 20 days. A third found found many of the same women in the camp and 5 received 40 days and one received 20 days in jail. Five coloured babies are known to have been born. The difficulties of the Hondurans and their crimes and bad behaviour were no more than other forester unit staff and the issues were exaggerated and given more publicity. The Hondurans saw themselves as fighting for the Mother Country and were accepted and entertained by local families.

Donald Ritchie,
29th January 2025