

# IRISH FORESTRY

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## Twenty-first Anniversary Dinner Address\*

T. O'BRIEN,

*Secretary of the Department of Lands.*

IT is a distinct pleasure for me to have the privilege of proposing the toast of the Society of Irish Foresters. Mr. Ó Móráin, the Minister for Lands, would have wished, had circumstances permitted to be present himself, to celebrate with you the Twenty-first Anniversary of the Society and he has asked me, as his representative at this function, to convey to the Society, and to its members, his own cordial good wishes for the continued success of the Society in the attainment of its laudable objectives.

As Secretary of the Department responsible for afforestation in the public and private aspects I too, have an abiding interest in the Society and have observed with pleasure its growth and achievements.

The Society, which draws its members from all the counties of Ireland, was founded in September of 1942 when a group of thirty people interested in the advancement of the knowledge of forestry came together as a Society dedicated to that purpose. It is an item of personal satisfaction that the great majority of those people were members of the staff of the Forestry Division so that the Society may be said to have germinated in our own Department; there can be no question as to the provenance of that seed.

Twenty-one years is in some ways a very long time, yet to many of us round the table here with vivid memories of the period it seems but a small step into the past. In 1942 the world was still at war. There were blackouts at night. All essentials were rationed; the newspapers attenuated. Little maps were scattered freely over those papers on which we learned of strange places like Tobruk and El Alamein. We learned something else in those days. Cut off from our normal supply routes, with our ships involved in the transport of absolute necessities there was little scope for the transportation of quantities of timber; we thus realised the folly of depending on imported timber supplies.

It was in that climate of opinion that the small band of practical idealists came together to form their Society and to determine its objects. I should rather say to determine its object, for the Society has but a single object that being "to advance and spread in Ireland the knowledge of Forestry in all its aspects". At a time when the objects

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\* This address was delivered by Mr. O'Brien in proposing the toast of "The Society" at the Gresham Hotel on the 16th November, 1963.

clause of most organisations reads like the Memorandum of Association of "Great Universal Stores" it is a tribute to the foresight of its founders and to the restraint of their successors, that the Society's singularly single object remains unchanged after 21 years.

In those twenty-one years the Society has moved to that object with purpose and determination. By 1943 the first issue of "Irish Forestry" the journal of the Society had made its appearance. The journal now reaches every continent and enjoys a high international reputation. It is quoted in technical articles on Forestry all over the world and has contributed seriously to the prestige of this country's technical achievement abroad. For the journal provides a forum for the exposition of ideas and research of the Society's members and of important Forest experts outside that circle and in some cases outside the country. Irish Forestry thus provides a two-way traffic in the spread of ideas.

It is not merely through the pages of the journal that the Society has opened its doors. To permit outside Forestry men to have their say; it has also provided the opportunity for men of international repute to offer their ideas for the benefit of the Society members and through them for the benefit of Irish forestry at large. Mr. Cameron of F.A.O., Dr. Sabroe of Denmark, Herr Oedekoven of Germany, Mr. McDonald of the British Forestry Commission, Mr. Woods of the Timber Development Association and Mr. Hiley of Dartington have all graced the Society's meetings and the late Dr. Anderson, who was a founder member of the Society made one of his few, if not his only, return visit to Ireland to attend one of the Society's General Meetings.

Apart from these visits of distinguished people the Society engages in a number of winter meetings, offering lectures, symposia and general discussions to members throughout the winter months. For a Society such as this the written or spoken word is not enough—as you are people whose interest is in the living trees. It is not surprising, then that from an early date much of the Society's work has taken them out of doors. I understand that their first outing was an epic wartime tour of the Suir Valley, on foot, as befitted the stringency of the times. This gallant undertaking, involving a walk of some 20 miles, of which we may perhaps hear more later, was successfully completed without the help of transport, apart, it is rumoured, from a horse drawn brake which set out from Clonmel in the late evening to rescue a few of the more footsore travellers.

The tour was the precursor of many more, not only to Irish forest areas, but to England, Scotland, Wales, Denmark and Germany. The last named, a tour of the Black Forest area, comprised the largest forestry tour to have visited that country. This is a striking tribute, not only to the Society's organising ability, but to the interest they have engendered in the acquisition of a knowledge of forestry. The Society has also entertained visiting groups of foresters, including the Welsh Forestry Society and quite recently gave their assistance to the Forestry

Division of my Department in organising a tour of foresters from Brittany. A visit by the Scottish Forestry Society is scheduled for next year. Before leaving the Society's specific activities let me mention just one further point. The Society is at present engaged in the preparation for publication of a "Guide to Irish Forestry". I have no doubt that this Guide will be in line with the responsible and authoritative work which we have come to expect from the Society.

While the Society has not sought to influence planting targets or policy nor to campaign for planting private or public, I feel that by their very existence they have contributed to the spectacular strides in forestry in this country during the years since their foundation. I say this, because in my experience, dedicated people of this kind set out with the object of spreading knowledge—and I accept that they do it ably and well—but they do something more. Invariably some of their direct honest enthusiasm rubs off on all who meet them, and inevitably those with whom they talk gain some feeling for afforestation in spite of themselves: nothing is more contagious than enthusiasm. The Society acts as a leaven spreading knowledge and helping to create the climate of opinion in which progress in afforestation on the scale we envisage becomes possible.

I know that everyone here will share with me pride and pleasure in the advances in State Forestry over the period of the Society's life. It is a picture of telling progress. If we take the four five-year periods from 1943 to date we find that State Forest planting was 19,000 acres in the first period, 49,000 acres in the second, 79,000 acres in the third and 124,000 acres in the five year period just ended. This indeed is a vast advance when we consider that at the time our native Government took over there was a mere 3,000 acres of State forest and even at the outbreak of the 1939 war the total area stood at 101,000 acres. Figures of themselves are dead things and rather hard to digest. Let me say then that in the last four years we have planted sufficient trees to form a belt one mile deep along every mile of the Cork-Dublin road. It is true that we must await the full financial impact of planting on this scale, but even in the short term we will soon be reaping a reward in thinnings and to-day we are providing steady and productive employment for 5,000 people in rural areas, much of it in the western counties to which we are looking as a good source of forest land.

Waste land or unemployed land is a calamity and we should not tolerate it. In the general drive and campaign for overall improvement we just cannot afford to neglect any of our resources: it is true that a country can be judged by what it does with its own resources. Ireland undoubtedly has the kind of climate trees like, plenty of rain, a long growing season and freedom from severe winter cold: we should capitalise on that and make it a primary duty to extract from Irish soil and Irish rain and sun and air every available drop of good we can pull out of it. And timber is one of the good things—the demand for timber and timber derivatives is steadily mounting.

By way of comment a forest nursery keeps on reminding me of a Bank—a sort of bank of soil, always at work and regularly earning, with the young trees a most dependable form of investment. It is a common-place to say that money does not grow *on* trees but my own Department and this Society are fully satisfied that money does grow *in* trees.

On the aesthetic side we are transforming the face of the country, putting muscle into hitherto barren areas, and we are not forgetting the amenity aspect. Forest parks will soon be taking shape and every effort is being made to ensure that, in our drive for self-sufficiency in timber, views and prospects of aesthetic value will not be impeded by growing trees: the set ambition is to flatter the landscape, not fight with it. On the private planting side, while we would be glad to see our efforts bear more fruit, it is nonetheless true that the enhanced planting grant coupled with steady propaganda has doubled the private planting rate to 1,000 acres per annum.

There is no doubt that the members of the Society have played their part in these achievements; they certainly have helped to build up a forest consciousness here. I have said before, and I repeat, that the members of the Society are dedicated men aiming at advancing knowledge of forestry in all its aspects in Ireland. I am satisfied that forestry will in the future be one of the really significant assets in our economic advance. I know that the Society of Irish Foresters is one of the dynamic factors contributing to that future.

We pay tribute here to-night to the Society and to that group of thirty people present at its inception—many of whom are still, happily, with us. They don't enjoy the hysteria associated with the "Beatles"—they traffic in more permanent things and command a more lasting confidence. I look forward to many, many anniversaries of the Society and to its continuing and pronounced success in the achievement of its object.