

**EDITORIAL****Looking back and valuing the past**

All that is gold does not glitter,  
Not all those who wander are lost;  
The old that is strong does not wither,  
Deep roots are not reached by the frost.

[From the Riddle of Strider in *The Lord of the Rings*, J.R.R. Tolkien]

Valuing the past is second nature to foresters as much of our future sits on, and grows out of, roots from the past. As the Society launches a newly updated website with a portal to a fully digitised catalogue of all articles from the published issues of this *Journal*, it is an appropriate moment to pause and appreciate the breadth and diversity of work that has been covered. Starting amid the last “war to end all wars”, it is interesting to note that subjects for discussion in the 1943 volume included coniferous afforestation, thinning practices, timber production etc., but also the valuing of other non-timber attributes like “conservation of moisture, prevention of soil erosion, wind shelter, and aid to rural beauty”, which all still sound extremely familiar today.

The major advantage of indexing the back issues onto the new Open Journal Software platform will be to make all material (not just peer-reviewed and technical articles) readily searchable from our own website but also from an outside interface (e.g. Google). While the new system is likely to have some teething problems, it is hoped that members and readers will inform the *Journal* about any content or performance-related issues. The laborious process of slicing up scans of past issues has impressed on me the long and continuous nature of *Irish Forestry*, and the importance of its being maintained. There are fascinating articles on all aspects of forestry in Ireland, but also from many international locations and perspectives. It is fun (now) to read some of the tit-for-tat letter exchanges! (This underlines the dearth of letters written to the Editor in recent years, which hopefully will change again.) There are even articles on how to organise forest tours (see McCusker 1980 [Volume 37(1): 31-35] in relation to the psychological needs of the forest guide). Such an eclectic trove of material that mixes at times highly technical and scientific research, with professional practice and discussion, to social records and literary digest, has long since moved beyond the ability of a person to maintain a knowledge of its content. It is high time that *Irish Forestry* was also made fully available as a digital resource!

In the current issue the value of past silvicultural practices for corrective management of broadleaved stands is explored in an article about “stumping back”. As

well as describing a case study from an extant trial, a review included which covers an impressive array of truly historical literature. There is also some considerable focus within this issue on the assessment of forest growth and economic potential. Practical tools are assessed for the measurement of mature trees and the quality of those in nursery storage. Methods for assessing economic factors that affect a silvicultural system or the ecosystem services provided are described. An article exploring the opportunities for acquiring land suitable for further afforestation is particularly topical. As is its companion article which describes a classification system for judging the potential quality of an afforestation site by using mainly soil and ground vegetation criteria.

To return to the theme of valuing the past, two articles in the Forest Perspectives section describe the acquisition of the Doneraile estate and the long association of a single family with the area. These complimentary stories combine to describe a period that stretches over 500 years and details a unique and captivating history. The Book Review section carries a review about the development of a “Heritage Arboretum” at Kilmacurragh, Co. Wicklow. A review of another book, *A Song for the Forest* by Tom Mongan, continues this theme and describes further recollections of forestry careers.

It is a considerable pity that to date nothing is set to come of the planned Long Term Forestry Research Initiative, much heralded in 2014. Despite significant activity across the forestry research sector, it appears that a chance to make a meaningful step toward sustainably supported research, which builds on work done to date, may have been lost. While it is a laudable aspiration to support the earliest (possible) point of research careers, one would hope that the full range of career stages of those that carry out research could assume at least an equal opportunity of winning funding. It is a poor recompense for previous service to render oneself increasingly unemployable. To properly value past research investment and effort (whether monitoring plots, experimental sites, datasets, or acquired knowledge and expertise), it is imperative that systems exist to assess and maintain that which is worth keeping and to ensure that hard-won expertise is not lost simply because of longevity –that would appear ironically unfair in a forestry sector!

In preparing material for the *Journal*, I have always “enjoyed” the Obituary section. It seems to me that people “in forestry” lead particularly interesting lives and it is something of a privilege to take part in recording some even admittedly small memorial. However, I have never considered the issue of organizing my own, perhaps reflecting my current stage in life. While working on this issue of the *Journal* I came to learn of the arrangements some of our members have made for writing each other’s obituary. I was impressed that this had occurred to them so early in life. Obviously that the choice of partner in such a venture would be crucial and the criteria for choice of the ideal candidate might easily change in the course of one’s career, making new

agreements (and some potentially awkward discussions) necessary. As an editor I can see the clear advantages so I would like to encourage all members and interested readers to make arrangements and to register these with the SIF office for ease of access for when it is eventually required!

To continue the theme of valuing the past and a long-term view, it is of great personal regret that I never met Niall OCarroll in person. We had several telephone conversations and quite a number of email exchanges. Quite enough for me to realise the sometimes terse nature to his character, however I finished each exchange with the feeling that the overriding motivation behind his efforts was always the furtherance of forestry in Ireland as well as an uncovering of truth (or stripping of phfaf)! In going through the back issues of our *Journal* I am continually impressed by the extent of his contributions. I am delighted that Ellen OCarroll continues the family tradition with her article “Seeing the wood for the trees” in the Forest Perspectives section. I trust and hope that Niall OCarroll’s spirit will have inspired some other woodland warriors for the modern times.