

## EDITORIAL

### Getting our house in order

I am the heat of your hearth on the cold winter nights,  
the friendly shade screening you from the summer sun,  
and my fruits are refreshing draughts quenching your thirst as  
you journey on.

I am the beam that holds your house, the board of your table,  
the bed on which you lie, and the timber that builds your boat.  
I am the handle of your hoe, the door of your homestead,

the wood of your cradle, and the shell of your coffin.  
I am the bread of kindness and the flower of beauty.  
Ye who pass by, listen to my prayer: Harm me not.

Attributed to Alberto da Veiga Simões (1888 – 1954)

During the course of the last century, forestry in Ireland has fought its way to becoming a significant land use and industry. It now accounts for 11% of the country's land area and has been contributing over two billion euro annually to the economy over recent years. Forestry is a key aspect of the country's National Mitigation Plan under the recent Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act (2015). Not for over 250 years has the sector enjoyed such good prospects. True, the continuation of the recent ambitious afforestation plan has been fraught with issues such as competition for land and the inflexibility of forestry's permanent land-use classification. However, the failure of the State's approvals system to cope with the blanket objections to afforestation, roading and felling licence applications over the course of the last year has the potential to become the greatest catastrophe the sector has had to cope with for some considerable time. The external review carried out by Jim MacKinnon described the systemic failure in detail and warned that the situation may have grave impacts on the livelihoods of all those involved in forestry. However, the considerable professionalism within Irish forestry means we don't need to shy away from its defense. But we do require a fair playing field that ensures that objections are meaningful, rather than just for their own sake. As a consequence, if it was difficult to convince a landowner of the benefits of forestry previously, the task to convince them now is about to become much more difficult.

This problem is at odds with an excellent situation for forest research. In the wake of questions about the capacity of the Irish research community to respond to forest research needs, there was a very strong response to the 2019 research call. Happily, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine has funded twelve forestry projects to the tune of a little over €4 million.

Offering hope in the face of great odds is the story of one of Ireland's tiny refugial populations of Scots pine. This inspiring tale is presented by Dr Jenni Roche as a meticulous investigation into various strands of evidence marking the right of the species to be viewed as "fully native" and the article reinforces rigorous scientific evidence with considerable historical detail. There is much in this article to inspire consideration of our forest and land-use policies. Other forms of sylvan relics are considered by John Mc Loughlin in his article about "modern" sacred trees. Our innate association with trees would appear to have survived intact in many areas from pre-Christian times -alas apparently not in Co. Leitrim, where 2019 has seen already considerable objections to forestry become ever more vociferous. However, we are not alone in such challenges as the Society's study tour to Lithuania discovered. Although endowed with substantially greater forest cover (33%) than Ireland, there is a vigorous public debate about how this resource should be managed. The tour report also mentions the curious travails of Scots pine in that country, where it has to cope with infestations of aggressive nesting cormorants. Another study tour, though of a different group, found similar sensitivity to commercial forest management in Wales. The Hardwood Focus discussion group visited our nearest Celtic neighbours to explore potential markets for Irish hardwood produce. Their discussions with producers and processors of small-dimensional timber make interesting reading and identify some excellent examples of potential products which could stimulate such innovation using material from early thinnings of Irish hardwood species. It is a pity it hasn't been possible to develop such markets in the UK prior to Brexit!

A very different hardwood legacy is considered by Dr Mary Forrest in her article about Dublin's street tree planting in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is indeed timely in the light of the public outcry at the proposed removal of substantial numbers of street trees to facilitate the development of bus corridors. It is interesting to note that quite a large proportion of the urban trees established during this period were privately funded.

The Trees Woods and Literature article in this issue has been written by Dr Anna Pilz about Lady Gregory's planting and woodland management at Coole, Co. Galway. This piece traces the awakening of interest and ultimately the development of expertise in someone whose place in society did not directly dictate such a calling. The concluding story of the catalpa tree at Coole is a touching legacy to this woodland history.

A silvicultural theme begins with the article by Jonathan Spazzi et al., who report

on an investigation into inventory protocols suitable for use in small-scale stands managed as continuous cover forestry. This is further developed by reviews of two recently revised text books. Savill's *Silviculture of Trees Used in British Forestry* has reached its third edition while Ashton and Kelty's *The Practice of Silviculture: Applied Forest Ecology* its tenth. Ted Wilson has provided a thought-provoking consideration of the latter in his review.

Interestingly, 2020 is the International Year of Plant Health (ironically, likely to be somewhat overshadowed by concerns for human health). Dr Richard O'Hanlon draws on some recent experiences in New Zealand in a Letter to the Editor to highlight how national approaches to biosecurity could be enhanced. He identifies the human element as the weakest link when it comes to forest health protection. Perhaps his advice should apply more generally to how biosecurity should be handled by State services as well as by the citizenry. This should apply equally to how we handle our borders as to how we handle hygiene and sanitation at and between sites.

The over-arching lesson to be learned from this issue's articles on the historical aspects of forestry and tree planting, is that they belie an innate resilience, often despite our human carelessness. Let us hope that with some more considered care and practicality we can use such inspiration to solve the difficulties besetting our sector and quickly "get our house in order". To follow Alberto da Veiga Simões' poem above, we should listen to the benevolent-but-fearful forest that appeals to us - not to harm it.