



Dear Members,

What difficult times we are living through! I hope that you are all keeping well and are being helped by your local community. It doesn't look good for our summer visit season as you can imagine. Although our planned visit to view the second batch of Telford Trees is planned for Sunday 10th May, after the Government's next review of the lock-down on 7th May, I do not expect the guidelines to be relaxed in a way that would allow the visit to go ahead. The visit is **not** yet cancelled but if it is unexpectedly allowed to go ahead you will be informed by email or phone with details of the rendez-vous etc.

Is Scots Pine native to Ireland? The Royal Forestry Society's digital Newsletter gave details of an article on this subject which appeared soon after Dael Sassoon's interesting talk to S.T.T. and should be of interest to members. Using some of Dael's methods, they have found that Scots Pine was indeed present in Ireland from 350 A.D. and that it should be regarded as truly native to Ireland.

I am not surprised to learn this from the aforementioned article as in the early 1980's I was shown mummified remnants of Scots pine in bogs on the Dingle Peninsula by an Englishman doing his best to re-establish a Sitka Spruce forest on the same land. The Englishman in question was the son of the Editor of the Spectator at the time, who had opted out of society and was living nearby in a stone cottage with mud floors and children running around with bare feet. In the days before the Irish Forest Service (Coilte) established its own seed business my old tree seed company, Forestart, used to sell significant quantities of seed to the Irish nurseries. The Englishman was a small customer and had invited me on one of my visits to Ireland to see some pre-historic evidence that the Dingle Peninsula had once been covered in forest.

Surplus oaks? Some of you may have seen in the national press stories about 750,000 oaks going to waste in UK nurseries because 'the UK Government had reneged on its promise of a huge national planting scheme'. As is often the case the story is only partly true.

Forest planting in the UK is a devolved responsibility. Scotland introduced a grant scheme three years ago which has been very successful and the target of 10,000 ha has been exceeded in the last 2 years (14,000ha in 2019). Scottish provenance oaks were sold out early on but none of the surplus oaks in English and Welsh nurseries were acceptable due to the provenance. One of these had made a very large collection of acorns from South West Wales two years ago in 2018.

In England and Wales the position is totally different. When I looked at the figures last October planting in both countries was well under half of target levels (England 1100ha, Wales 300 ha. In England despite promises from the previous Government no new grant scheme was forthcoming as it seems they were awaiting for the new E.L.M. (Environment Land Management) scheme, which of course was delayed by the election. In Wales forestry has been amalgamated with another environmental agency and its grant scheme was also slow to get off the ground.

When I spoke to my very good contact in the industry (whose out-grades we have grown-on for a year and have used in our planting schemes) just before the present crisis struck he told me that many of his customers who placed their orders with him early last autumn in expectation of orders, now had plenty of oak available.

The net result of all this is that the expected demand for English and Welsh oaks did not materialise. Where the Press blamed the UK Government they got it wrong. The Scottish Government should be exonerated!

Future plant supply. There is no doubt that Covid 19 has had a significant effect on tree production for future years. Most UK nurseries still line out seedlings to produce a 1 + 1 or 1 + 2 plants but lining-out machines are designed to have six workers sitting more or less side by side. There will therefore be a shortage of such plants next winter. Those nurseries who produce usable one year old or two year old seedlings are much better off as there are few occasions when two workers must be closer than 2m apart. The nurseries producing plants in cells have also had to modify their methods of production to maintain the 2m spacing but have mostly managed to produce their desired numbers. Overall, obtaining plants for planting in the 2020-2021 winter might prove more challenging than in the past.

Andy Gordon – Chairman

Tallest Trees

I have just been reading an old copy of *A World of Trees* magazine about an expedition undertaken by lecturers of Sparsholt College in Hampshire pursuing the tallest trees in the United Kingdom. The resultant information is quite old now as the trip took place in February 2009 but it's the last piece of information I can find that gives the definitive heights of the four tallest trees in Britain.

For some time there had been dispute between two Douglas Firs as to which one was tallest; one in Wales and one in Scotland. They were, supposedly, neck and neck; some years the Welsh tree was the tallest whilst the Scottish tree just beat it in other years. Today, however, the Welsh Douglas Fir which stood near the side of

Lake Vyrnwy no longer competes. It was hit by storm winds which took out its top a few years ago. If you were to find it today in theory, you would have to go along the north east side of the lake and you'll find it near a car park where its top has now been carved into a hand.

Scotland therefore reigns supreme in having the United Kingdoms' four tallest trees and the Sparsholt team found and measured them all. Before I mention their heights, however, let me mention for comparison the world's tallest tree, a Coast Redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*). This tree, named 'Hyperion' stands in the Redwood National Park in California and is, today, around 381 feet in height. If my maths is correct, that's approximately 116 metres. Now let's compare that with these four trees in Scotland.

The tallest tree in the U.K. is the Stronardon Douglas Fir in Argyll. On 19th February 2009 this stood at 63.79 metres. Bear in mind that in the last ten years or so, it will have grown a little taller. The second tallest tree, at 62.70 metres was the Diana's Grove Grand Fir at Blair Castle in Perthshire; the third, the Dughall Mor Douglas Fir in Inverness stood at 62.02 metres; whilst the fourth, the Hermitage Douglas Fir at Dunkeld, also in Perthshire, came close at 61.31 metres. So these four stand at just over a half of the height of Hyperion.

What about the tallest tree in England? This is, supposedly, in the forest between Dunster and Timberscombe in Somerset but more about that another time.

John Tuer – Tree Planting Officer

A note from the editor:

As has been widely acknowledged the improvement in air quality under present conditions is 'a good thing' and one we should take note of. A woman in a newspaper report who had been furloughed felt she was 'able to connect with nature and the spring' in a way not thought possible before. My local community has rallied together online and physically to help each other in a way not seen for a time. I am not judging or preaching, just noting. But then most of us tree folk secretly knew this and hoped for something a bit more radical. As I remarked recently to a member 'better the child in Sweden than the adult in America' (him of the disinfectant comments). We of the S.T.T. are a community and we value your support. And yes, the Council is fixing the roads during lock-down. David Martin (ed.)

What farming teaches us about the Crisis

To the Soil Association,

Thank you for the letter you sent out to farmers and growers last week. If I could make a few comments about the present situation.

I am convinced that if the virus had hit Britain in the damp, mild weather of last October and November the effect on the N.H.S. would have been completely disastrous. That it struck in early spring and has been at its most virulent during one of the driest springs with

constant high pressure for several weeks has been its saving grace which makes the government's regulations for people to stay indoors completely illogical if not downright harmful. This has actually caused groups of people, whether as families or as we now see in nursing homes, to constantly contaminate each other. You would never treat sick livestock in such a way, you would keep them away from each other in as much fresh air as possible, especially when weather conditions were so favourable. Indeed, on a global scale as an island nation it should have been far easier for the UK to avoid contamination, that it did not augurs very badly for the future of agriculture.

Not for the first time, for those of us who remember vividly foot and mouth crises, C.J.D./B.S.E. and the bovine T.B. situation (the truth of none of these has ever been realised or learnt from), the respective governments use the blame-gaming phrase that they are 'guided by the science'. They should instead be guided by common sense and throughout this crisis has intimated that people should be advised to spend as much time as possible in open spaces, parks, National Trust properties, gardens etc., whilst maintaining social distancing. In fact I would suggest the government has got but one thing correct in the last few weeks and that is the concept of social distancing. Every other step that has been taken seems to have been through ineptitude or panic.

There is an old saying that the more money you throw at a problem, the worse that problem becomes (I am very much of the opinion that the only factor that is sustaining bovine T.B. is the compensation scheme) and the borrowing levels now being mooted are so colossal as to be unsustainable. It took sixty odd years to pay off World War 2 debts, it is said that the debts from financial crisis of 2008 will last until end of this century, the guarantees now being made to businesses are terrifying. If there is any sort of farming problem now there would be no help whatsoever. An old saying of mine is that one must make oneself as independent of the state as possible because in the end the state will collapse under its own weight. The state is very close to that right now.

On a more practical level which might be of interest, I run the Shropshire Agroforestry Project and in recent years when a group visits my farm someone always mentions that there is no ash dieback here (all initial planting was ash and walnut). I comment that one of the guiding principles of the work is that no two trees of the same genus are planted next to each other to minimise transmission of pests or disease, a form of arboreal social distancing. It has been effective so far but only time will tell if it is a solution.

Peter Aspin – Committee Member (from a letter to the Soil Association)

And finally a newly recorded 700 year old oak at Acton Scott, (seen by Andy Gordon before lock-down rules were tightened): This tree was growing before the plague of 1349, makes you think....

