

# Irish Tree Society Newsletter

Winter 2003

Contents	Pg
◆ Editorial	1
◆ From the Committee	1
◆ Members forum	1
◆ Society activities	1
◆ Trips	
○ Vive La France! (9-13 May)	2
○ Limerick (14-16 June)	4
○ Co. Wicklow (12 July)	5
○ Suir Valley (6-7 September)	6
◆ Forest biogroups: a note on the unknown	8
◆ Tree tips: Group dying in conifers; Pruning as art	8
◆ Book review	9

## Editorial

This is a new beginning for the newsletter. We've agreed to give it a try on an annual basis for a few years as the best means of communication we have.

Eventually we may be able to distribute it electronically through e-mail but we have decided that too many of our members don't have e-mail right now for it to be feasible this year.

We appreciate the authors who send in material for the newsletter and apologise (again) for any editing that becomes necessary. Such good words are unfortunately sometimes too many good words for the space available and we have to make painful adjustments.

To lessen the pain, we are planning to ask people in advance, not after the fact, to do a write-up on each trip. We also hope to make advance arrangements for pictures. As future authors (and the editor) see how much can be included in any one article, we will know how much is about all we can handle. And finally, we won't be as stringent as we were last time on limiting the newsletter to only six single sided pages. Within reason, we will include as much as we can.

We hope you enjoy this issue and are eager to contribute to and read more in the coming years.

## From the Committee (via the Editor)

Members simply *must* be better about letting Maureen know when we are coming to weekend events. We had the embarrassing situation in the summer where initially the number of cars was limited, some people who wanted to sign up in advance were turned away when the numbers filled up, then others showed up on site unannounced and were admitted because the host kindly allowed it.

This caused understandable hard feelings in those who had been initially refused, made the Society look rather foolish because we had no idea how many were coming when we had been asked to limit the numbers and worst of all put Maureen squarely in the middle. It really isn't on—we are all adults and can surely act like responsible adults.

One way to handle it is when you receive your mailing early in the year showing the trips coming up, sit right down and mark those you are interested in and either mark on your calendar when you need to contact Maureen or do it right then. However you do it, don't let it slide, then expect others to make things work for you.

And related to that is paying in advance. It is demeaning all around when Liam and Maureen have to chase after people to pay. Frequently the Society has to pay in advance to have a head gardener go around with us or have a special tea provided by our host. That money should be available when it is needed, not when somebody catches up to us and demands it.

Please help us to make our volunteer efforts as smooth as possible for the good of all of us in the Society.

## Members Forum

An empty slot for this issue but we hope you will use it in the future to make comments, share ideas and generally communicate with the rest of us. Again, we reserve the right to choose and edit as necessary, but welcome your contributions.

## Society Activities

The facsimile edition of **Samuel Hayes** "*Practical Treatise on Trees*" 1794, is now a completed project and available at all good book sellers or for order at a price of €30. (See order form at end of newsletter.)

Congratulations to Thomas Pakenham, who has written an erudite foreword and thanks to



Philip and Patsy Harvey and Liam O'Flanagan for their indefatigable labours. The book was launched by Michael McDowell, T.D. the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform on 4 November. Seventy-three copies were sold at the launch

The **Tree Register of Ireland** or TROI is the register of Champions and important trees in all of Ireland, developed and managed under the auspices of The Tree Council of Ireland. The ITS is affiliated with The Tree Council and Liam O'Flanagan is our representative on the Steering Committee. This register is to be launched formally soon and the data base is to be housed at the National Botanic Gardens at Glasnevin.

Arising from this involvement with TROI, the ITS is to give a grant to Aubrey Fennel for costs and expenses towards updating the register. Aubrey has located many more significant trees.

Have you looked at the TROI web site yet? When you do, you can find out interesting facts such as the tallest tree and the one with largest girth in your county. For those of you in Co. Wicklow, for example, the tallest is a Douglas fir at Powerscourt, a place we would expect to have Champions. But the one with largest girth is a sweet chestnut in Ashford.

It's worth looking up your county trees and going to see them. You don't have to be with the rest of us to admire greatness, especially when it's so close to home.

For this and other useful information, log on to [www.treecouncil.ie](http://www.treecouncil.ie). See what else you can find out.

The **American Garden at Headfort, Kells** is a once fine garden which is contiguous with the pleasure grounds of Headfort School and has become sadly overgrown. The total area is about 7 acres and 65% is owned by the school and the rest by a private owner. The ITS is giving a once off grant towards the clearing and rehabilitation of the School property and the individual owner has agreed to clear his part at the same time.

The **Oak Wood** which was planted by Thomas Pakenham on his land at Lough Derravaragh is now two years old. The acorns were procured from various oaks of Irish origin. This project will take some time before maturity.

## Trips

### Vive La France! (9-13 May)

An annual trip outside Ireland has become one of the highlights, perhaps *the* highlight, of our programme. So popular was the trip to Belgium last year that this year's trip to France was over-subscribed. Thosefortunates who booked early were not disappointed.

On arrival in Orleans in our luxury coach we had the evening free to explore the historic city of Jeanne d'Arc and to sample its superb restaurants. The next day we visited the 45 hectare **Arboretum National des Barres**. Now owned by the state, it was originally owned by the celebrated Vilmorin family, plant collectors, breeders and nurserymen, who began planting there in 1821. We saw one of the richest collections of trees and scrubs in the world but there were few of the giants so beloved by ITS members and the overall impression was of benign neglect. I suspect that the Vilmorins would have kept it under better control.

More enjoyable to my mind was our visit the next morning to the **Arboretum de la Fosse**. As the Harveys wrote in their most helpful advance information sheets, this estate represents the passion of one family for gardening over 250 years. Successive generations of the Gerard family have been planting here since 1751. As new exotic plants and trees were discovered around the world they were brought here and planted on a vast south-facing slope above the Loire. We saw magnolias, cornus and rhododendrons at their best. Among the many important trees we saw magnificent examples of *Cedrus brevifolia*, *Pinus laricio*, *Juniperus drupacea*, *Cephalotaxus fortunei*, *Quercus dentate* and some large Irish yews.



Thomas with M. Jaques Gerard



Mr. Jacques Gerard, the owner, (described by some ladies in the group as handsome and charming) welcomed us under a gigantic cedar, showed us his treasures with justifiable pride, treated us to a delicious local wine in the shadow of a huge pigeonnaire and sent us happily on our way to the Chateau de Sasnieres.

At the **Chateau de Sasnieres** we lunched in the grande salle of the mill, hosted by the owners, M. Guillaume and Mme. Rosamee Henrion. Nestling in a sheltered valley, the gardens of Mme. Henrion are laid out with particular attention to the growth habits of the plants. The trees are not yet huge but they have been given room to flourish. Those of us with our own arboreta admired her good sense and envied her space.

On Sunday evening the ever-resourceful Philip had arranged a special evening meal at the charming Restaurant St. Catherine. This lay just off the main square where many of us were wont to gather near the huge statue of Jeanne d'Arc on horseback for a relaxing drink in the evening sunshine. The meal brought a delightful day to a convivial conclusion.

Monday morning saw us at the **parc et jardin botanique du Prieure d'Orchaise**, the home of M. Hubert and Mme. Collette Treuille. The priory dates from the middle ages but the seven acre garden has been planted over the past thirty-five years by the present owners. Hubert Treuille, a fervent naturalist and worldwide traveller, has gathered over 2,200 varieties of trees and shrubs from all parts of the world. He welcomed us and told us, at some length, about his travels and collection.



#### **M. Hubert Treuille welcomes us**

After this he and Mme. Treuille showed us magnificent magnolias, cornus, acers, etc. He has collected a large number of strange variants such as a *Pendulous cercidiphyllum*,

tortuous willows, variegated liriodendrons, etc. described, sotto voce, by our chairman, as "freaks". The Mackies were enchanted with his lovely *Prunus maackii*. (I would like to have taken home his magnificent bramah perdun bleu cock and hen.) In my brief speech of thanks I congratulated the Treuilles on their having won first prize for best garden in the French horticultural society in 1993.

The magnificence of the garden made us rather late for lunch at Les Trois Marchands at Herault. But with characteristic French insouciance the restaurateur adjusted his timetable and treated us to the most delicious asparagus I have ever tasted. The Cotes du Rhone was superb, too.

Fortunately Philip Harvey did not imbibe to excess because it was announced that the French air-traffic controllers were going on a one-day strike the next day, and that our return flight had been cancelled. I shudder to think what Philip's mobile phone bill came to, but by the time we reached our afternoon destination, the Chateau de Chaumont, Philip had established that our airline would have one flight only from Paris to Dublin, in the morning, and that he had succeeded in transferring us en bloc to that flight. Well done Philip!

The transfer to the morning flight meant that we would not have time to visit the Arboretum les Grandes Bruyeres, so the **Chateau de Chaumont** was our last visit. Both the chateau itself and trees on the estate were magnificent. The largest trees were ancient *Cedrus Atlanticus* and younger but taller *Sequoia giganteum*. But the remarkable stables must rank as one of the most memorable features. It was obvious that the French nobility of the time ensured that their horses, and in this case their elephant too, were housed in greater luxury than their tenants.

That evening we reflected on three marvellous days. Thanks to the vast amount of careful preparation by Philip and Patsy Harvey, who had personally visited all our venues in advance and whose fluency in French was invaluable, the trip went without a hitch. Philip even foiled the efforts of the striking French air controllers to strand us in France. On reflection, so happy was the trip, that some of us might not have minded spending a few more days in the delightful environs of Orleans.

Michael Scott



## Limerick (14-16 June)

Our tour guide to the **Glenstal Abbey** forests which he tends was Brother Anthony Keane, a dedicated treeman with controversial views, and an excellent host.

Among the fine trees seen was a champion Sitka spruce *Picea sitchensis*, reputed to be an original Douglas introduction. It had been struck by lightning, exploded, but appeared to be recovering. He showed us a plantation of spruce he is developing as a continuous cover forest with no clear felling. A very welcome sight was several newly planted unusual conifers acquired from Edinburgh Botanical Gardens, including a *Taiwania cryptomerioides*. Some of his interesting ideas about the complexities of tree growth are expressed in a later article.



### Brother Anthony as our guide

Felicity Roche graciously asked us to her home, Maddaboy, on Saturday for our picnic lunch. We enjoyed her garden and lawn and some of us got the grand tour of Larry's tree plantation. Thank you Felicity!

**Islanmore** is a pleasing Georgian house, built in 1794, and is the home of Mr. and Mrs. John Tarry. It is surrounded by three acres of mown lawns with shrubberies and mature specimen trees. The beautifully kept grounds

are an integral part of a stud and thoroughbred breeding farm, specialising in brood mares and yearling care.

Mary Tarry very kindly showed us around the fine arboretum which has two Irish Reserve Champion trees: manna ash *Fraxinus ornus* and variegated oak *Quercus robur variagata*. Other admirable trees were: Indian horse chestnut *Aesculus indica*, black mulberry *Morus nigra*, and an ash *Fraxinus excelsior* which was at least 250 years old.

Just as one had almost reached a tree surfeit, Mary led us into the finest walled garden that most of us have ever seen. The roses were at their peak, the long peony bed was brilliant and there were splendid herbaceous borders. Finally, we entered a potting shed to visit a delightful Victorian glasshouse.

**Adare Manor** is a public business now with a well-used golf course & restaurant. The tree plantings were interesting, particularly the Irish Champion Cedar of Lebanon *Cedrus libani*, which was scaled by Aubrey at Thomas's behest to count the rings on an excised branch – the conclusion was that it was probably planted nearer 1800 than the reputed 1640.



### Adare Manor *Cedrus libani*

Also a fine cork oak *Quercus suber*, and extraordinary (some would say ugly) weeping beech *Fagus sylvatica 'pendula'*. The old pleasure grounds included an espalier ginkgo and a fine liquidamber – they were romantic but unfortunately untended and overgrown.

We picnicked among the trees at **Curraghchase** forest and went on to view the lonely ruined house with its lovely views. Of particular interest among the plantings were a one-leaved ash *Fraxinus excelsior 'diversifolia'*, a Morinda spruce *Picea smithiana*, a very fine larch with branches touching the ground, and a newly found Irish Champion silver pendent lime *Tilia petiolaris*,



also the largest in the British Isles. An avenue of *Pinus radiata* was showing signs of the 'yellows', a fungal disease which badly affects this species in Ireland from about 35 years, leading Coillte to conclude that it cannot be an important forestry species here as it is in New Zealand.

Desmond and Olda Fitzgerald were our hosts for a tour of the grounds at **Glin Castle** and a delicious lunch. Among the plants particularly noticed were several fine *Cornus capitata*, a vast Monterey pine *Pinus radiata*, a *Drumys winteri*, and a large variegated sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* 'variegatum'. A superb *Parrotia persica* was the focal point of the formal garden with clipped bay trees.

Our thanks go to Aubrey in particular and others who organised such a fine week-end for us, including the great weather.

Several contributors

### Co. Wicklow (12 July)

This was an idyllic day—blue sky, sunshine and kind hosts, generous with time, knowledge and comestibles.

**Luggala**, home of Garech de Brun is charmingly situated in the steep sided valley at the head of Lough Tay. It is spectacularly scenic with the natural beauty of lake and mountains being set off by plantings and a herd of Sika deer.

Garech welcomed us with glasses of champagne in his salon with recently restored Gothic windows. He also treated us with a discourse on his trees. The plantings have continued in the La Touche style with rarities and exotics amid more usual temperate species. He continues this theme and has put in a *Tilia* collection and rare Chinese and Japanese species. These are appreciative of the acid soil and frequent conditions of mist and low cloud. The exotics included: Japanese Snowball Tree *Strax japonica* in flower; Japanese umbrella pine *Sciadopitys verticillata*—my personal tree of the day; big leaved Chinese lime *Tilia tuan*; Moltke's lime *Tilia X moltkei* a rarely cultivated tree; a new juniper from Burma which was most attractive.

During our tree observations, Garech led us to Edward Delaney's fine figure of The Good Shepherd, standing in a glade. It was originally commissioned, some time ago, for Mother Mary Martin. Her nephew Peter Martin was with us and most interested in this impressive sculpture and the story of the acquisition.

By the lake there was a fine stand of *Populus tremula* "aspen", a native Irish species. The big original tree had suckered and made an impressive aspen copse, carefully fenced off from the deer. The trembling leaves gave rise to the aspen's old Irish name "crithach", the trembling or shivering one. The Brehon Laws list the Aspen among the "lower divisions of the wood" and there was a big fine, like a sheep, for the illegal extirpation of an aspen.

Sir Robert and Lady Davis-Goff greeted us most kindly when we arrived at **Ballinacor**. Here, in the hot sun we enjoyed our picnic luncheon and the Irish Tree Society AGM.

The house stands at the end of a long shallow valley, with fine oak woods behind it, sessile oak *Quercus petraea*. These woods continue around and flank the slopes of the valley. Most unusually the lower sides of the woods were faced in places with conifers. Robert and Paddy Bowe took us around the estate and explained the work in progress. The river, running central down the valley, is being restored to resurrect the canal. The canal is not centred on the house, but is closer to the avenue, doubtless to impress those traversing the long approach to the residence.

The oaks were excellent and a pleasure to wander through. A group of large Douglas fir *Pseudotsuga menziesii* was rather special. Douglas fir are usually planted separately as lone specimen trees in Ireland. Their cones are easily recognised by the pointy tridentate bracts, between the woody cone scales. Other significant trees included one of the biggest noble fir *Abies procera* in the country and a Norway spruce *Picea abies*. These were in vogue and planted in the romantic period of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and now many have died of old age.

Robert and Sheelagh then invited us into their home and treated us to a splendid and welcome tea, which was much appreciated by all.

A traditional **National School House**, with the traditional separate sides for boys and girls, has been converted into a weekend home by Paddy and Nicola Gordon Bowe. They kindly plied us with wine and showed us the house and garden.

This garden was planned for minimum work and maintenance, with also one idiosyncratic theme—a collection of monotypic trees and shrubs. Monotypic plants are species of which there is only a single representative of the



species in the genus, sometimes in the family and order, too.

This is a garden of a Robinsonian philosophy. William Robinson, 1838-1935, the red-headed Irishman believed that exotic species were high-lighted and set off by being interspersed with common native species, giving a natural effect. We saw a great bank of brambles *Rubus fruticosus* agg. for the children to pick blackberries in season. There was hazel *Corylus avellana* for nuts; hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and other hedgerow plants. The more recently planted monotypic exotica included: Prince Albert's Yew *Saxegotha conspicua*; *Fitzroya cupressoides*, discovered by Charles Darwin c. 1834 and named for the captain of the Beagle; Japanese Umbrella pine *Sciadopitys verticillata*; the handkerchief tree *Davidia involucreata*. There was a discussion as to whether the Maiden Hair Tree *Ginkgo biloba* would grow happily in this garden. It is the only surviving species of those abundant in the Jurassic Era. It is now a single species of a single genus and single order—the Ginkgoales.

The Irish Tree Society visit to Co. Wicklow was a splendid and interesting day. We saw three very diverse gardens, united by the enthusiasm of their owners for their trees and shrubs. Our very sincere appreciation and thanks to Garech de Brun, Sir Robert and Lady Davis-Goff and Paddy and Nicola Bowe. We are also grateful to Philip Harvey and Grania Langrishe for the arrangements of the day.

Faith White

### Suir Valley (6-7 September)

The majestic scale of the Suir valley, lying between the Knockmealdown Mountains and Slievenamon to the north and the Comeraghs to the south, must be unique in the Irish landscape. It is not surprising that the rich soils should have attracted landowners to establish their estates here. As we discovered, the topography is also most suitable for the cultivation of a wide range of trees.

Some 60 or more members convened at **Gurteen Le Poer**, our first port of call. This is a large Tudor-Baronial house, built in 1866 for the first Count de la Poer, on lands on the south bank of the river Suir. In this sheltered place, nature has facilitated the development of mighty conifers and deciduous trees of great girth and height, including a false acacia,

*Robinia pseudoacacia*, the biggest girthed specimen in Ireland, at 28.5m, the tallest wild cherry, *Prunus avium*, and the coast redwood, *Sequoia sempervirens*, with a girth of 23m, one of the biggest in Ireland.



### Admiring the *Sequoia sempervirens*

**Lismore Castle**, in Co. Waterford, descended to the dukes of Devonshire from the Great Earl of Cork; it has been their Irish home since the seventeenth century.

The Lower Garden, which we first visited, on this idyllic late summer afternoon, contained many particularly fine magnolias, planted mainly in the '50s and '60's by the Duchess of Devonshire. A huge *M. delavayi* pressing up against the south wall of the castle concerned some of us.



**Lismore Castle *Magnolia delavayi***



Below the east wing, there is an avenue of *Eucryphia intermedia* 'Rostrevor'. These trees, which were in flower, were echoed cleverly by a tall bronze conical sculpture.

The delightful upper garden did not contain many trees, but the water meadows beneath the castle have on their northern perimeter the largest red maple, *Acer rubra*, in Ireland, and one of the tallest common ash, *Fraxinus excelsior*. The Irish Champion dawn redwood, *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*, is also here; it is not particularly impressive as it divides into two stems fairly low down, but it does have the biggest girth, having been planted not long after its mid-twentieth century introduction.

On the river bank to the east of the bridge was a memorable example of the silver maple, *Acer saccharinum*, its wonderful autumn colouring already apparent.

Sunday was to be taken up with visits to two estates on the north side of the Suir. Both are now in the ownership of a local man who made his fortune in England, and is appropriately named Mr. English!

**Marlfield** is a fine Palladian late 18th century house; the central block was burned in 1923 but rebuilt. Behind the linking wall to the west wing is a magnificent cast-iron conservatory, which houses, among others, a number of abutilons of varying hues and an acacia threatening to go through the roof. We also found a curious plant, first thought to be of the pea family, but on closer examination found to be plastic, one of two "plants" of such origin that taxed the taxonomists that day!

Many of us had not seen a one-leaved ash, *F.e. 'Diversifolia'* before. This grows in the park, along with Turkey oak, *Q. cerris* and a manna ash, *F. ornus*, with a curious bulging graft at 1m. Indiscriminate ploughing however, has killed many fine trees, and threatens others.

The raindrops falling through a magnificent tulip tree, *Liriodendron tulipifera* had a wonderful leathery resonance, a dimension of tree appreciation that had not occurred to me before.

Close by is **Knocklofty**, former seat of the Earls of Donoughmore. The late Earl and his Countess were victims of an I.R.A. kidnapping in the late seventies, subsequently deciding to sell the property, which is now a hotel.

We saw a bay tree, *Laurus nobilis*, which is the Champion of Ireland and Great Britain. A Spanish chestnut, *Castanea sativa* stood out for its remarkable crop of fruit, like spiky green

pompoms all over the tree. The arboretum contained other excellent specimens, for example a Serbian spruce, *Picea omorika* was notable for its tall narrow columnar habit; more often these trees are conical in shape in our climate. A curiosity many had not seen before was the Chinese cowtail pine, *Cephalotaxus fortunei*. This is never more than a small tree, but often in damp sheltered conditions has extremely luxuriant shoots, as in this example.

Identification puzzles were posed by a cedar; was it a deodar or cedar of Lebanon? There was also some dispute about a beech; was it *Fagus sylvatica* or *orientalis*? According to Mitchell, the difference lies in the former having seven or fewer veins to the leaf, while the latter has seven or more. In this case the leaves were considerably larger than normally found in *sylvatica*, and some contained nine or ten pairs. Jan Ravensberg offered the suggestion that it might be *F. sylvatica* var. *macrophylla*.

These were two educational, as well as pleasurable, late-summer days. We were able to identify trees which would be too large in maturity for urban or even suburban gardens, but many examples would be containable and desirable legacies for future generations. Care must be taken to ensure they are not overcrowded, a common mistake for the "plantaholic", if ultimately they are to be seen at their best.

We saw that trees survive even when neglected. This is encouraging, for some of the estates are shadows of their former glory, and inappropriate developments in their neglected grounds threaten their trees, and their original context. Our Society must have a valuable role in not only recording these plantings, but in seeking to assure their very survival. Perhaps some form of grant-aided intervention under the auspices of our society might be devised at a future date.

Some trees observed

**Gurteen Le Poer**: silver birch, *Betula pendula*, of exceptional girth; false acacia, *Robinia pseudoacacia*, the biggest girthed specimen in Ireland; Corsican pine, *Pinus nigra* subsp. *Laricio*; Holm oak, *Quercus ilex*; red oak, *Q. rubra*, of good size; wild cherry, *Prunus avium*, 28.5m. the tallest in Ireland; Wellingtonia, or giant sequoia, *Sequoiadendron giganteum*, 48m; western red cedar, *Thuja plicata*, each covering a considerable area of ground; Nootka cypress, *Chamaecyparis nootkatensis*;



Hiba, *Thuja plicata*; coast redwood, *Sequoia sempervirens*, girth of 23m, one of the biggest in Ireland.

Lismore Castle: magnolia *obovata* (or *M. hypoleuca*); *M. delavayi*, planted up against the south wall of the castle; *M. grandiflora*; *M. sprengeri*; *Eucryphia intermedia* 'Rostrevor'; red maple, *Acer rubra*, the largest in Ireland; common ash, *Fraxinus excelsior*, one of the tallest; dawn redwood, *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*, Irish Champion; silver maple, *A. saccharinum*, exceptional colouring. Marlfield: one-leaved ash, *Fraxinus e. 'Diversifolia'*; Turkey oak, *Q. cerris*; tulip tree, *Liriodendron tulipifera*; Oregon maple, *A. macrophyllum*, the trunk; yellow buckeye, *Aesculus flava*; black Italian *P. Nigra* 'Serotina'; sweetgum, *Liquidambar styraciflua*; Persian ironwood, *Parrotia persica*; common ash, *F. excelsior*, The Irish Champion. Knocklofty: *Magnolia soulangeana*, 2 groups of 4; bay tree, *Laurus nobilis*, Champion of Ireland and Great Britain; London plane, *Platanus x hispanica*, (Mitchell calls it *P. xacerifolia* (maple-leaved); maple, *Acer cappadocicum*; Spanish chestnut, *Castanea sativa*; Serbian spruce, *Picea omorika* notable for its tall narrow columnar habit; holly, *Ilex aquifolium* 'Myrtifolia', or was it *I. myrtifolia*; holly, *I. a. 'Pyramidalis'*; Chinese cowtail pine, *Cephalotaxus fortunei*.

Robert Spencer Myerscough

## Forest biogroups: a note on the unknown

The author here finally gives up and presents the few pieces he has assembled of an unsolved jigsaw puzzle to the learned reader, and hopes for help in putting a bigger picture together.

Forest biogrouping, the joining, normally through the root systems, of two or more specimens of a species to form what looks like a single plant, seems quite common in forests of Norway and Sitka spruce.

The individual trees of the group share a common degree of health and colour, form a fairly unbroken outline at crown level and may show some pronounced root buttresses developing in the direction of other members of the group.

When one member of the group is cut, the others keep it alive: stumps of spruce cut ten years earlier and without any foliage of their own can be seen to be still alive and callusing over as if it were not a tree but a branch of the

group that were cut. What grief is caused to the group, what a check on growth and what diseases introduced by such incursions (sometimes called 'thinning') are largely unknown but are probably of interest to the forester.

How does biogrouping occur? Does the sharing of parents in the orchard stand help? Or do the silken strands of mycorrhiza introduce strangers while plying them with liquid nourishment? And why is all this happening underground? What else is going on there that we cannot see? The great underground world of bacteria, archaea and eucarya, the great kingdom of the Invisibles, many times more ancient, more powerful and more numerous than our own, laid out the lines and still control our destiny. In our contemporary society we have isolated the pathologies of ageism and sexism. Visibilism is a more serious disease of the eye of the soul that may threaten our survival.

When the ravishing iron-wielding Celts invaded our land they rode rough shod over the country, haughty in their ignorance of its ways until they noticed that the corn was weak as withered grass and the milk was thin as water. Then in their panic they went down underground to King Dagda, king of the Tuatha de Danaan, whom they had defeated. Dagda, to their surprise, received them well and asked what he could do for them. They, in fear and trembling asked him would he ever give them back the harvest. He replied he would, on this condition alone, that they would respect the hollow hills and holy places.

The phenomenon of biogrouping among trees in the forest is just one hint of its abundant mystery. Crude management techniques, associated perhaps with absentee and institutionalised ownership, and including massive clear felling and undiscerning thinning, are, increasingly, being questioned. Then there is the use of biocides, toxic at point of manufacture and application both, chilling the blood with cold and the earth with death. We do not sound the knell of nature with our toxins, for nature will survive and with terrifying carelessness will cut off those who misbehave and poison the poisonous. We should not insult the proffered cup of life, for, as Shakespeare says, this even handed Justice commends to our own lips the ingredients of our poisoned chalice.

Yet is nature always abundant and forgiving, offering pardon and symbiotic composition



even to the blindest of parasites if they but listen to the music.

Brother Anthony Keane OSB

## Tree tips

### Group dying in conifers

This can occur in gardens or arboreta where the clearing of scrub or vegetation involves the burning of the debris and subsequent planting of conifers on or in the vicinity of where the fires were. I have taken the note underneath from *Sitka spruce in Ireland* by Padraic M Joyce and Niall O Carroll, 2002, by kind permission of the publishers, COFORD, (National Council for Forest Research and Development). Incidentally, the book is well worth buying and is available from: COFORD, Agriculture Building, UCD, Belfield, Dublin 4 (01-7167700)

Liam O'Flanagan

"Group dying of Sitka spruce was first observed in Ireland in 1953 by McKay and Clear (1953, 1955) following which they proceeded to establish an association between the disease and the fungus *Rhizina undulata* (known in the US as the teapot fungus). The disease is manifested by the death of groups of trees, from a few to several dozen, occurring sporadically throughout the plantation. The crowns first become thin and a complete shedding of the needles may take place suddenly in the middle of the growing season. Many of the needles fall while still green. Death of trees may be accompanied by copious resin flow on the stem. The sporophores develop in the month of September, and their abundance is dependent on the weather during the previous summer, being most abundant after a warm dry season. *Rhizina* is seen as potentially damaging to Sitka spruce in British Columbia (Peterson *et al.* 1997).

An observed association between dead groups and fires led to the experimental demonstration that the lighting of fires in the forest could lead to tree mortality and the development of the *Rhizina* sporophores (de Brit and OCarroll 1967). This research had a practical outcome in that the lighting of cooking fires within the forest was prohibited, and gas cooking appliances were distributed to all forest worker gangs. Spores of the fungus remain dormant in the soil and germinate under the influence of heat. The disease is prevented by avoiding the lighting

of cooking fires within the forest. Newly planted trees are occasionally killed on the sites of slash burning fires but this is not a widespread phenomenon. *Rhizina* fructifications have also been seen to develop profusely on charred debris remaining after an accidental fire had burned through post-clearfelling slash.

It is interesting to note that the famous German forest pathologist, Robert Hartig, (1894) recorded the presence of this fungus in association with diseased and dead four- to ten-year old conifer specimens, including *Picea Sitkaensis* (sic)."

## Pruning as art

We all know how ugly the remains of a sawn tree limb can be—that great shining disc of light wood glaring at us like a giant eye. One thought is to prune to make a more or less corrugated crown which catches the light at different angles. In a very short time it will look rather like lightening has broken off the branch and simply disappear into the background. If you are really clever with the chain saw, it may truly become a work of sculpture.

## Book review

Cassell's TREES of BRITAIN & NORTHERN EUROPE, David More and John White Cassell 2003, ISBN 0-304-36192-5 ST£ 50.00

This is an entirely new volume and not an update of previous Cassell's books. It is a profusely and clearly illustrated guide to trees of temperate climates, growing in Great Britain, Ireland and Northern Europe. It is a big book with 800 pages, describing over 1800 species, hybrids and cultivars with fine paintings, depicting complete trees and significant details of some of their features. These illustrations relate easily to the real tree. A life's work by David More.

The text is written by John White and gives a comprehensive account of species. A careful description, geographical spread, introduction into collections, cultivation notes, uses and comments of interest.

The book is a pleasure to peruse. Two indices—English and Latin—assist in looking up your tree of choice.

The new Cassell's TREES is a *must* for the dedicated tree enthusiast.

Faith White



Newsletter edited by:  
Marty Sanders  
Turavagaun, Dromineer  
Nenagh, Co. Tipperary  
Phone 067-24987  
Fax 067-24983  
e-mail [martys@iol.ie](mailto:martys@iol.ie)

All errors are my responsibility and apologies to the authors for any mistakes made in transcribing or editing their material.

For future reference, we understand the preferred way to write tree names is with the common name capitals for those named after a state, town or person (Sitka spruce, Scots pine, etc.) and the remaining word and non-proper nouns in lower case (lodgepole pine, noble fir, etc.) followed by the botanical name in italics, first word capitalised.

I've tried to give credit where I knew about contributions but may have inadvertently left someone out. Mea culpa.

If you wish to order Samuel Hayes Practical Treatise on Trees, copies can be sent to you at €30 each, post free. Please fill in this form and send it to:

The Hon. Secretary  
The Irish Tree Society  
Lough Park House  
Castlepollard, Co. Westmeath

Please send me \_\_\_\_\_ copies @ €30.00 each, including postage and packing.

I enclose a cheque for \_\_\_\_\_ Euro

[Check is preferable unless credit card required for sale.]

I wish to pay by credit card; my details are as follows:

Visa/Access/Mastercard number

\_\_\_\_\_

Expiry date \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Name and address:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_