

Q&A

JUSTIN MUMFORD

Justin Mumford is BSc(Hons), MSc, MICFor, CEnv, Managing Director, Lockhart Garratt Ltd, a leading environmental planning and forestry consultancy

How has forestry changed since you began in the profession?

My father first put a rusty old McCulloch chainsaw in my hand when I was about 12, to set about clearing up some storm damage on the farm with some old-fashioned chainsaw proof spats that went over the top of my wellies, and that was about it. Health and safety has greatly improved since then, and is now getting the attention it needs through FISA, which is great to see.

At that time, we were also planting up areas with vigorous poplar hybrid clones, in particular Beaupré and Boelare, which we were all getting very excited about, thinking it was going to make our fortune. How wrong we were!

As I entered the profession, private woodland estates were just losing tax relief and I was starting to see the importance of forestry start to slip as part of the wider estate portfolio. Mechanisation has increased massively, not just in terms of the size and speed of kit, but also in its variety and ability to work in a range of woodlands. This has helped to deliver into a number of interesting markets, which were not around 20 years ago. At the same time, however, we have also seen markets disappear, for example, I spent ages marketing rustic poles, which now are only a very small niche market.

The industry has also had to become a lot more political, and Confor's work in this respect has been crucial, in order to make sure our voice is heard in a far more complicated rural economy.

How do you think Brexit will impact on the industry? And what should Confor do in response?

I am quite excited about forestry in a post-Brexit environment. All land management is now due for a big shake up, and I can see forestry coming out of it in better shape than where it is right now. I am already hearing that interesting discussions are starting to develop around how forestry can be seen as the deliverer of huge public benefit, offering value to the public purse. This will raise the profile of forestry as a land use, and make it an important part of the rural estates asset. It is very much undervalued and not given the attention or resources it should in a lot of cases. We have uncertainty though for the next four years, and we are already seeing owners looking to hold off taking matters forward until they know

more about what opportunities may be available post-2022.

I can see the wider trade deals taking longer than the two-year window based on how matters have started. If an extension cannot be agreed, we may see levies placed on timber imports resulting in benefits for the domestic grower.

Confor are doing an excellent job in outlining the benefits of commercially managed woodland, not just at a political level, but also within the sector and, most importantly, to the general public. It is important that Confor continues to educate the public and takes the role of the Public Relations Manager of the sector. It was interesting to hear of Michael Gove's comments about environmental legislation being strengthened as opposed to weakened post-Brexit, which again may have benefits to the sector, although the devil will very much be in the detail. (See p9)

There is a lot of political interest in planting trees, eg for carbon and urban leisure and health. Is the Government missing a trick?

There may well be a lot of political interest in planting trees but this is yet to filter down to the landowners, particularly in England. The barriers are not new, devaluation of land, lack of early yield and the inflexibility of long-term land use change have all contributed. As one client often reminds me, as soon as he puts trees in the ground he has in effect, nationalised his land.

Joined-up thinking between Government departments, which would benefit from tree planting, would potentially require a Ministry of its own to achieve this, and considerable resources to back it.

Landscape, leisure and health were very much the emotional factors rallying the 500,000+ signatories, so we know that people are passionate about trees and woodland, and want to see more, and we all know this can still be done and delivered within a commercially managed setting.

What do you see in the future for Lockhart Garratt? Where are the growth opportunities?

Rural professional services are becoming more and more specialised and complex. As a result, we see much more demand for our forestry services from other professionals. We look forward



we are continuing to see opportunities to expand geographically and broaden our skills base with more specialist ecologists, arboricultural consultants, landscape architects and soil scientists. With this breath of expertise, we can provide a better management service.

Has the profile of people working in forestry changed since you began? Should it change further?

The sector has certainly become much more professional and specialised since I began. This is across agents, consultants and contractors; expertise now requires not only sound forestry management knowledge but also wider business administration and human resource understanding. It was encouraging to see that the industry was beginning to recognise this and was starting to make a big step forward through the Forestry Learning Network which was frustratingly cut short, however, the new apprenticeship syllabus is very much providing guidance on these wider aspects of knowledge and understanding.

As a business we have had success in recruiting people into the industry who are seeing forestry as a second career, and who bring with them a wealth of life experience, from the likes of ship brokers, telecommunications, consultants and property analysts. (See Member Profile on RTS Forestry, p28.)

If the Forestry Minister called you on the phone, what would be your one key point?

Please hold the post for a bit longer than your predecessors, and lay down a forestry policy that supports and develops commercial forestry for the long term, not just to the end of the current parliamentary session!

to continuing to make sure that both clients and landowners place importance on forestry and see it as an asset. I can, however, see matters becoming increasingly complicated. We will have to work quickly in order to capitalise on opportunities within eco-service systems and potential agroforestry projects.

The need for more complex silvicultural prescriptions and challenging external factors, such as pest and disease, and climate change, has meant that much more informed and evidence-based decisions need to be made. As a business,



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Lockhart Garratt was established in 1998 and has become one of England's leading independent environmental planning and forestry consultancies. The company employs over 35 staff, providing expert advice relating to arboriculture, ecology, forestry, woodland management, landscape planning and design and green infrastructure from both their Northamptonshire and Oxfordshire offices.

Contact 01536 408840
justin.mumford@lgluk.com
www.lgluk.com