Chairman’s Report
February 2015

Looking back over the last twelve months, I am pleased to be able to report that this has been a year of progress and achievement by the CCFG. Not only have we held our usual trio of successful, stimulating and well attended field meetings, but we have organised and hosted one of the major British forestry conferences in recent years. Thanks to careful stewardship of our resources, our finances are in better shape than in previous years and our membership is increasing. The major role that CCF can play in delivering the aims of forest policies in England, Scotland and Wales is increasingly being recognised and hopefully we shall see further uptake and practice of CCF by forest managers and owners across Great Britain.

As noted above, the major event of the year was the two day conference held in early June 2014 in the Lake District with the theme of ‘Continuous Cover Forestry - Delivering Sustainable and Resilient Woodlands in Britain’. This was attended by about 140 people from all over Britain and abroad and comprised an excellent mixture of indoor presentations and field visits. All the reports from the conference and many of the presentations are available on the conference website at: http://www.ccfg.org.uk/conferences/conference2014/conference2014_resources.html.

I would encourage all members of CCFG to have a look through the documents and to listen to the presentations since there is much useful and valuable information to be found there. I am certain that these outputs will still be being referenced in years to come. The success of the conference owed a great deal to the tireless and enthusiastic work of the conference committee, Vicky Bowman, Gareth Browning, Rik Pakenham, Sharon Rodhouse, Jim Ralph and Ted Wilson, ably supported by Dee Tomlinson, Gill Pemberton, and many other helpers. On behalf of CCFG I would like to thank them all very much for all their hard work. I also attach below at the end of this report the 12 conclusions that we (the CCFG committee) drew from this event. These conclusions will form the basis of much of our activity over the next few years.

You can find more details of the three successful field meetings in England, Scotland and Wales, the sites visited and the points raised in the reports included in this newsletter. We are very grateful to our hosts for being prepared to receive us and to the Country coordinators (Rik, Martin, and Colin) for making the arrangements. Plans are already well advanced for a further set of interesting field visits during 2015 as you can see from the announcements on the website. We have also rearranged our previously postponed visit to southern Poland and this will now take place in June 2015.

1
We are considerably indebted to Dr Maciej Pach of the University of Krakow for all his help in organising our visit. The participants will be drawn from both CCFG and ProSilva Ireland and the sites to be visited sound fascinating, ranging from virgin forests to irregular shelterwood stands and old coppice woodlands of small leaved lime.

In September, I attended the ProSilva annual meeting in Switzerland, and a fuller report of the field visit is included elsewhere in this newsletter. The annual business meeting and other informal discussions provided a good opportunity to hear about issues relating to the practice of CCF in other member countries. For instance, colleagues in ProSilva Wallonia have published an interesting and well illustrated technical guide on the practice of CCF (or ‘Sylviculture ProSilva’) which you can find on their website at: http://www.prosilvawallonie.be/sites/default/files/documents/infoProSilva.pdf.

It is also good to be able to report that Dr Lucie Vitkova, recently of University College Dublin, has recently been appointed as Executive Assistant to ProSilva’s Executive Board. Lucie will be known to members of CCFG for various interesting articles relating to CCF that have been published in British and Irish forestry journals in the last couple of years and she attended our conference in the Lake District in June. We look forward to working closely with Lucie as she settles into her new role. The ProSilva annual meeting in 2015 will take place in the Czech Republic and further details will be made available on our website in due course.

As always, I must thank all the members of your committee for the time and effort that they have given to the group over the course of the year. I would particularly like to thank the three country coordinators, Rik Pakenham, Colin Edwards, and Martin Price for the careful arrangements they made for three excellent field meetings. Jim Ralph has been very careful to ensure that our finances are kept in order and it is pleasing to see that our financial position is healthy despite the difficult economic times.

However, the most important thank you is due to Gill Pemberton who has managed the administrative side of our affairs carefully and conscientiously despite all the additional pressures that came with the 2014 conference. As most members will know, Gill decided some months ago that the time had come to step down from the post of Administrator at the end of 2014. Gill has been carrying out that role for CCFG since 2009 and has provided the bedrock on which our organisation has been able to flourish. I know that all the members will join me in thanking Gill for all she has done over the last six years and we wish her all the best for the future. We presented her with a copy of the ‘New Sylva’, written by Gabriel Hemery and illustrated by Sarah Simblet, at the Lakes Conference as a token of our gratitude.

We carried out a recruitment exercise in the autumn to identify Gill’s replacement and have been fortunate to appoint Mandy Clinch, who took up the post of Administrator at the beginning of 2015. You will find a piece from Mandy introducing herself elsewhere in the Newsletter.
Conclusions from the 2014 CCFG Conference in the Lake District in June 2014.

1. Forests in Britain are facing a period of uncertainty due to global climate change and the potential impacts of pests and diseases. Many conventional practices that focused on the creation of large-scale plantation forests, composed of a limited number of species, are currently being reconsidered in order to enhance the sustainability and ecological resilience of forest resources in Britain, and in order to deliver a wide range of ecosystem services.

2. Among the most important strategies for enhanced resilience are those that promote greater forest diversity, in terms of widening the genetic base, species composition and woodland structure. Diverse woodlands can offer greater adaptive capacity in response to global climate change, and resilience to pests and diseases.

3. Continuous cover forestry (CCF) is one potential strategy for enhancing resilience since it encourages diverse stand structures and is suitable for mixed-species forests. CCF is not a specific silvicultural system, but it does presume to avoid clear-felling and other silvicultural systems that create even-aged forest stands of single species. Site factors, species composition and management objectives dictate the most appropriate silvicultural systems and pattern of stand interventions that will create and maintain a continuous cover forest.

4. Continuous cover forestry has been applied to forests in parts of mainland Europe for well over a century. While there is a long history of individual woodlands and estates in Britain being managed in ways that accord with CCF principles, it is only since the 1990s that a growing number of public and private sector woodlands have adopted CCF approaches. However, although country forestry policies have increasingly promoted CCF as a desirable form of woodland management, there appear to be no accurate figures showing the extent of CCF at a country level.

5. CCF in Britain is increasingly being applied in public and private sector woodlands. Experience from several public and private estates is demonstrating that CCF can be both profitable and environmentally-appropriate, while delivering a wide range of ecosystem services. The regular flow of forest products of different species and size class offers a range of opportunities for land-owners. The quality of residual stands can be enhanced from one cutting cycle to the next through selection of final harvest trees at the optimum stage in their development, and through thinning that produces merchantable products but also leaves trees that have potential to increase in volume, quality and value.

6. CCF is highly compatible with the provision of a wide range of ecosystem services from forests. Among the many values that are promoted through CCF are landscape character, carbon capture and storage, hydrological cycles and regulation of water quality, wildlife habitat and biodiversity conservation. In particular, there is growing evidence that CCF is important for woodland biodiversity, due to the wide variety of habitats that are created and sustained. Components of woodlands that are compatible with CCF management systems and support a wide range of flora and fauna include large dimension trees, standing dead trees and downed woody debris.
7. CCF requires a range of skills and monitoring systems that are distinct from the methods commonly used in even-aged woodland management. Improved protocols for assessing growth, yield and productivity, timber quality and woodland values are required to ensure that the CCF approaches are more widely adopted and able to achieve their potential.

8. Good management skills are required to effectively operate CCF systems. Skills in marking trees, designing and developing management prescriptions, managing canopy gaps and controlling the type and quality of natural regeneration, harvesting systems, timber extraction and marketing of products need to be improved to ensure that CCF systems operate effectively and achieve high standards of environmental conservation.

9. Deer and other pest species, such as grey squirrel, are among the most important threats to the sustainability of continuous cover forests, especially through their potential impact on natural regeneration, the recruitment of desirable species and also on the quality of timber.

10. The evidence base needs to be strengthened to duly realise the potential of CCF and to ensure greater diversity and resilience of woodlands in Britain. Research is required at several scales to fully realise the impacts, interactions, opportunities and limitations of CCF. New methods for predicting growth and yield that incorporate mixed-species, irregular structure stands are a priority.

11. The wider application of continuous cover forestry in the private sector needs to be supported through measures such as the provision of flexible and long-term grants that facilitate appropriate alternative silvicultural and regeneration practices to promote the transformation of even-aged stands to irregular structured woodlands.

12. Training and advice are required to support the wider adoption of CCF approaches. Supporting and expanding the network of research and training sites will provide more opportunities for foresters to gain insight and experience in best practices. Greater support is required for technology development and knowledge transfer programmes dedicated to continuous cover forestry. Such measures can be complemented by the further development of a network of well documented demonstration sites.