



CELEBRATION

Professor Julian Evans OBE FICFor, Past President (2013–2015)

OUR FIRST 100 YEARS

AN INFORMAL HISTORY

From the first proposal for a new Scottish forestry society in 1925 to the Royal Chartered professional body it is today, we chart the challenges and remarkable contributions that have shaped the Institute during its first century.



Image: Mark Anderson's original letter of July 1925

The idea of a learned society of foresters was first proposed in 1925 by Mark Anderson, a pioneer of continuous cover forestry known for his 'uneven aged forestry plots'. His letter of July 1925 called for a meeting "to bring together all those interested in Scottish Forestry, who are agreed that it is desirable to form a new Scottish Forestry Society..."

Mark wanted the society confined to Scotland with only one class of membership, but the 25 or so members who met at the Imperial

Forestry Institute, Oxford, on 5 August 1926 disagreed on both counts. Mark resigned and thereafter had little to do with the newly formed Society of Foresters of Great Britain, but he was not forgotten. His remarkable contribution to forestry practice was honoured with the posthumous awarding of the Institute's Medal in 1962.

“The object of the Society shall be to advance and spread in Great Britain the knowledge of technical forestry in all its aspects.”

An eclectic membership

"The object of the Society shall be to advance and spread in Great Britain the knowledge of technical forestry in all its aspects." This short, clear statement in the 1926 constitution was applied with rigour and vigour.

The learned society ethos was central in the early years and key to this was the publication of a journal reporting the latest research, science and advances. The first issue of *Forestry*, the Institute's scientific journal, appeared in 1927 under the demanding

editorship of H M Steven. It remains to this day a world-class journal of forest science – even if these days we don't all read all of it!

Field visits and discussions on site were, from the very first, another element ensuring the highest standards to deliver best practice. On an early field meeting examining losses in Newcastleton Forest, James MacDonald recalled: "The divisional officer pointed to a tree and said: 'Rabbits, I think, my Lord.' My Lord [Lovat] bent down and picked a long piece of wool off it and said: 'Sheep I'm afraid.'"

A striking feature revealed in the early minutes is its eclectic membership. The first president, Roy (later Lord) Robinson, was a Forestry Commissioner. Both Royal Botanic Gardens (Kew and Edinburgh) featured among the 100 or so members, as did academia, forest products research, Forestry Commission (FC) divisional officers and researchers.

For many years, numbers remained in the low hundreds. However, this understates the Society's impact, since so many were senior professionals – professors of forestry, FC conservators, directors of institutes and the like.

1925

Mark Anderson proposes a new forestry society for Scotland

1927

First issue of *Forestry* journal published

1926

Formation of the Society of Foresters of Great Britain in Oxford

The membership graph below traces our rise from these small beginnings, then a large blip followed by a dramatic increase that every organisation would wish for. However, even today our membership of over 2000 represents only around 20% of those active in forestry and arboriculture. And why, today, are there few from the botanical world, despite Great Britain possessing many of the world's finest public and private arboreta and gardens? Academics, too, are less well represented than in the past.

Pre-war and wartime years

The Society held its AGM at Kew in 1933, sent a "loyal message" to his majesty King George V on his silver jubilee in 1935 and reported in 1938 that something that never changes is the "...need for propaganda to develop a forestry sense among our people." Arguably the same remains true today. Also in the late 1930s, support for the Society and the esteem in which *Forestry* was held was evidenced by the Forestry Commission (FC) contributing £50 a year for three years for the journal's upkeep.

Wartime brought the expected restrictions and additional challenges. *Forestry* reduced from

two to one issue per year from 1942, Council members remained in office until hostilities ceased and the Ramblers' Association voiced their concerns that wartime fellings would impair amenity. The impact of war dragged on for several years – the Society's files record food parcels for foresters in Great Britain coming from the New Zealand Institute of Foresters at least until 1949.

In 1946, H M Steven stepped down as editor of *Forestry* after 19 years. The same year saw the Society introduce its highest honour, a medal for "...those who have rendered eminent service to British forestry". The first recipient was FC Chair Sir Roy (later Lord) Robinson.

Image: Forestry editor H M Steven addressing a 1947 field trip at Hill 99, Culbin Forest in Moray.

The membership graph



1961

Proposal for transformation into a professional body

1965

Regular members' newsletter launched

Society becomes the Institute of Foresters of Great Britain

1973

1986

Institute launches its own entry examinations

2003

Members' newsletter becomes *Chartered Forester* magazine

1962

Mark Anderson posthumously awarded Society Medal

1965

Society joins the Central Forestry Examination Board

1982

Incorporation by Royal Charter

1988

Forestry moves from two to four issues a year

2003

Professional Membership Entry (PME) process introduced

Towards a professional body

In the immediate post-war years, many great names in forestry – those my generation looked up to – joined the Society. To name but a few, I had the privilege of working indirectly under Dallas Mithen and George G Stewart, while J W L Zehetmayr was my conservator in South Wales in the early 1970s. He was a true 'people person' and an exemplar of good leadership.

Sir Harry Champion was elected President in 1958 and Professor Mobbs in 1960, leading in 1961 to a paper to Council proposing transformation of the Society into a professional body. Communication with members was improved with the launch of a regular newsletter in 1965. But it was not all corporate affairs and high ambition; the scourge of grey squirrels was on Council's agenda in 1967! In 1973, the Society became the Institute of Foresters of Great Britain.

In the early years, one shortcoming as a learned society was, to quote Esmond Harris, then Director of the Royal Forestry Society (RFS) "...surprising and disappointing how little the former Society of Foresters contributed to the development of forestry education." The Society did eventually join with the Royal Forestry Societies and become one of the constituent members of the Central Forestry Examination Board in 1965. But Esmond was surely right when we consider how, as a charity today, forestry education is key to ensuring not only that Chartered Arboriculturists and Chartered Foresters are properly qualified, but also in promoting the very best of trees and forestry to the public and politicians.

Becoming the Institute

The incorporation by Royal Charter in 1982 completed the transformation into a professional body. The Institute of Chartered Foresters had come of age. To celebrate, it published a 52-page booklet expressing what chartered status meant and what the future might hold.



Image: Advert from Royal Charter 1982 booklet

The booklet also included warmest wishes from fellow forestry bodies including the FC, Association of Professional Foresters (APF), Fountain Forestry, Men of the Trees, The Society of Irish Foresters, University of Aberdeen, The Royal Scottish Forestry Society and Lynders Forest Nursery. Alongside are advertisements from many of the main players in our sector, including a rather amusing one for protective clothing which features a naked, 30-something male with a chainsaw, suitably covered where it matters!

The Institute achieved another first in 1982 when it co-hosted the Broadleaves in Britain conference with the FC. It was believed at the time to have been the largest ever forestry gathering, with 240 delegates. Each received a book of all the papers on arrival – a remarkable achievement.

Contributors and their topics in the commemorative booklet

George Holmes, Director-General Forestry Commission, Institute and British Forestry. Dick Steele, Director-General, Nature Conservancy Council. What a Royal Charter means. Professor Charles Taylor, University of Edinburgh. An Institution for Foresters. The Institute's Future. Douglas Malcolm, University of Edinburgh. The Institute's Publications. A reminiscence between EJM Davies and James MacDonald. Esmond Harris, Director Royal Forestry Society Education in Forestry. Jean Balfour, Chair, Countryside Commission for Scotland. Relations with Conservation. Dennis Crawford, Managing-Director, Scottish Woodland Owners Ltd. How management companies emerged. Mike Ashmole, Executive Director, International Union of Societies of Foresters. The International Connection.



Image: ICF Council meeting, 1994

All this was only a beginning. The standard had been set and the bar raised, but now came the hard work of delivering it: making 'chartered' a respected professional qualification, with post-nominals recognised as of value and a mark of trustworthiness. Significant next steps included our flagship journal *Forestry* increasing to four issues per year in 1988, the newsletter evolving into the much-valued *The Chartered Forester* (subsequently just *Chartered Forester*, now *TREES*) magazine, and more recently, the opening of a second office in Bristol in 2013.

Maintaining the highest standards

Petitioning for and receiving a Royal Charter from Her Majesty the late Queen Elizabeth II in 1982 conferred a great honour and public recognition, as well as a huge responsibility. Standards of entry migrated from reliance on accredited educational qualifications to those plus our own examinations, first overseen by University of Bangor's irrepressible Dr Geoffrey

Elliott in 1986. Just over 20 years ago, the current Professional Membership Entry (PME) process was introduced. Today, PME is a key part of Institute life, with 61 applications in 2024.

The high standard of entry must continue throughout a chartered individual's career with life-long learning. Like other professional bodies responsible for accreditation, continuous professional development (CPD) is expected to be recorded year by year. Attending regional meetings and webinars, the annual conference, study tours, contributing to Council and committees, reading publications and visiting websites are not sufficient of itself, but need to form part of planned continuous learning. Recording CPD might be a chore, but what it demonstrates is to be championed.

Demonstrable competence in forestry and arboricultural practice is not enough; high ethical standards must be maintained at all times, in all situations. Integrity of members is paramount and hence a complaints procedure is vital for when standards lapse. Since 2013, a retired judge has chaired the Institute's Complaints Panel and our Code of Ethics has been updated.

Decline and revival

A downturn in membership around the millennium greatly worried Council. Particularly concerning were declining applications to become Associates, the seed corn of future Members and Fellows. The restructure of examinations and broadening of entry opportunities in the late 1990s had not brought the hoped-for increases, while the Institute itself felt members were not being adequately served and supported.

The Institute was withering, even losing confidence. A radical solution was explored: to merge with the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) and transfer membership to them, with forestry catered for as a sub-group. Among many other things, RICS were keen to get their hands on our profitable and prestigious journal, *Forestry*. In 2005, a special issue of *The Chartered Forester* presented the case ahead of putting the proposition to a membership-wide vote. It seemed the perfect solution: survival and security. But a majority of members rejected the proposal, fearing that professional tree and forest management would be swallowed up by RICS, the Goliath to the David of the ICF.

Reflecting on the proposition today, one wonders whether the membership decline reflected the general malaise in studying forestry seen throughout Europe and Anglo-Saxon economies at that time. But the decisive vote did seem to galvanise the Institute and with a change of President and Executive Director, other avenues were explored. Credit must be given to Shireen Chambers MBE FICFor, whose 16 years at the helm saw an incredible rise in membership.

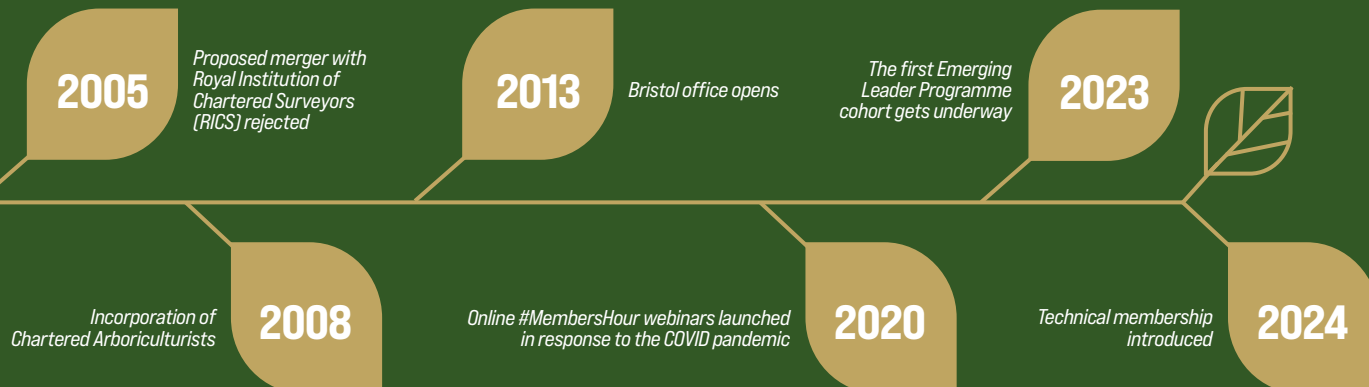
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Image: Presentation of the Royal Charter in 1982 (l-r Dr William Mutch OBE FICFor, Dallas Mithen CB FICFor, Dr Douglas Malcolm OBE FICFor, Margaret Dick OBE)



Image: Field trip to the New Forest (date unknown)



Over the last 30 years, the Institute has gradually broadened its appeal to arboriculturists working with trees in amenity, the built environment and parkland.



Image: Chartered Arboriculturist byelaw amendment

Welcoming all tree professionals
Over the last 30 years, the Institute has gradually broadened its appeal to arboriculturists working with trees in amenity, the built environment and parkland. In 2008, the Institute's bylaws were amended (with approval by the Privy Council on 5 June 2008) to incorporate Chartered Arboriculturist and to allow such members to use MICFor and FICFor (where appropriate) as designation of chartered status. Subsequent national conferences have focused on this field at least once every three years, with the series Trees, People and the Built Environment first running in 2011.

Arboriculture represented a broadening of professional membership and in 2024 a new class, Technical membership, was introduced to diversify the membership further. The Covid pandemic saw us turn challenges into opportunities: restrictions stimulated a proliferation of webinars, video meetings, #MembersHour and other online developments. With hindsight, this may have done more than anything to raise the Institute's profile and appeal in our sector.

The Institute's impact across the sector and beyond has grown, with ICF representatives on the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS), British Standards, Tree Design and Action Group (TDAG), Wales Forest Business Partnership, Green Infrastructure Partnership, New Forest Consultative Panel and many other groups. Perhaps most significant was Shireen Chambers' membership in 2012 of

the Independent Panel on Forestry, which established forestry policy in Britain for a generation.

As we look ahead at the next 100 years, let me conclude with the words of FC Director-General George Holmes at the time of our incorporation by Royal Charter in 1982: "In the long run, it is the professionalism, vision and integrity of the forester on which the future of the industry largely depends." Today we would reword this slightly to widen the embrace and include all concerned with the wellbeing of trees, woodlands and forests — wherever they are and for all that they offer. The point remains: it is our "professionalism, vision and integrity" that matters.

Browse our centenary events, birthday messages and more at [charteredforesters.org/centenary](https://www.charteredforesters.org/centenary)

A history of long service

The Institute is fortunate enough to have benefited from the long and faithful service of several dedicated individuals. Among them were Edinburgh solicitor Angus Galloway, who served as secretary to the Society from its inception in 1926 to 1962.

More recently, Margaret Dick OBE (Secretary and Treasurer from 1977 to 2004) and Shireen Chambers MBE FICFor (Executive Director, 2006 to 2022), were both recognised with national honours. Our journal *Forestry* has been blessed with long-serving editors — both R W V Palmer and Dr Gary Kerr FICFor were in post for more than 20 years.



Shireen Chambers
MBE FICFor



Dr Gary Kerr
FICFor

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