



CRANN 5 Years on

CRANN

Jan Alexander



Jan Alexander, founder of Crann with children from Drumeela National School, weeding the trees planted shortly after Crann set up in Co Leitrim.

Readers of the Leitrim Guardian will have followed the progress of Crann since its launch in June 1986. We are a Leitrim based national organisation whose purpose is the planting and promoting of broadleaved trees in Ireland.

Although Crann has grown to be a 2,000 member strong organisation, we are still a small staff of people with limited resources. Our aim is to create employment throughout the country by introducing one land-use diversity into the farm holding which will add to the overall farm income.

In the early years of Crann it seemed as if we were going against the advice of the state. The only trees being planted for economic purposes were the softwood producing coniferous trees, – mainly Sitka Spruce, which every Leitrim person will be well familiar with.

But things are slowly changing and now some broadleaved species are at last being recognised for their commercial potential. The new grants and forest premiums available through the Department of

Energy Forest Service reflect this change.

In 1969 the then Minister for Lands, Mr Sean Flangan, instructed the State Forest Service "to make an all out drive to acquire land in County Leitrim, to plant it and thereby give employment to as many people as possible in that area."

The forestry plantations which resulted from both that instruction and later on from the private forestry investment companies which sprang up around the same time as the EEC grants for private forestry were introduced, are extensive and expanding. The dramatic change these forests caused to the landscape, coupled with continued population decline, did nothing to warm the hearts of the people of Leitrim towards forestry. Encouraging Leitrim people to sell their land, often to foreign investors, would seem to be contradictory to the aim of stabilizing the population.

Now, in 1991 with the national planting target up to 30,000 hectares per annum by 1993, along

with crippling emigration county and increasingly un- conditions for the future of sma. farming as we know it, – the idea of farm woodlands would appear to be an idea whose time has come. The grants to help do this are food; the forest premium payments are now realistic; the county is capable of growing trees quicker than anywhere in Europe. We don't want the entire county of Leitrim to be blanket forested with dark, evergreen forests. Broadleaved trees do grow well here, as every farmer will have observed.

The creation of sustainable employment in the region is crucial. While competition between the private forestry investment companies to acquire land for planting is strong, little has been done in terms of co-ordinating a viable scheme designed for the small farmer who is looking for another option apart from selling his/her land and moving away for the area.

The Local Project – A Pilot Tree Scheme

In March 1991 a small group of individuals gathered at the Crann H Q in Aughavas to look at the possi-

Jan Alexander at the organisation's b.q. in Aughavas, with two of Crann's former trainees, Niall Miller and Yvonne Shields, who now run Ashling Woodland Development (from Mobill).



bility of devising just such a tree scheme for small farmers. We have had a good few meetings since then and the closer we look into the idea, the more appropriate and feasible the idea has become. Below is a brief outline of the idea.

Stage 1: For landowners, farmers and other interested people in the area to combine their collective land, resources, knowledge and skills to develop a multi-purpose, mixed forestry resource within a sustainable and community based integrated plan.

Stage 2: To utilise the timber produced from this forest resource within the area both through existing timber industries and through development of new timber based industries.

Stage 3: To generate work both directly through timber production and related downstream industries and indirectly through integrated local tourism.

This approach to forestry is the opposite to efforts which are currently being practiced in this county. It is about encouraging people not to sell their land; to avail of the grants themselves; to plant an agreed mixture of mainly broadleaved trees on suitable parts of their farms; to grow small quantities of high value timber rather than

large volumes of two value timber and to help safeguard the future and the way of life of the small farmer in the county.

The forests envisaged for this pilot tree scheme will bring many benefits to the small farmer. Early thinnings will provide a continual supply of good burning firewood. Fencing posts will also result from early thinning. We already have a good market for Ash at 18-25 years for the manufacture of hurleys and once a decent volume of clean hardwood timber is coming on stream and grown to a sustainable plan, it will then be possible to identify and develop other markets and uses for the timber.

Unlike the heavy "blanket" effect that single species coniferous plantation have on our landscape, these farm woodlands will blend beautifully with the unique drumlin landscape of Leitrim. There will be a variety of species used which will add to the colour and diversity of the landscape.

This approach to growing trees will actually enhance tourism in the area. The small woodlands will look beautiful; provide more shelter for game; provide at the least a continual crop of firewood and at the best a valuable hardwood timber resource for which to sustain small

timber based industries within county.

The Next Step - What is Needed
We need to know if there is an interest towards developing this project for small farm woodlands. We need people with:- land; spare time; tree establishment experience; knowledge of timber; knowledge of Leitrim soils; experience of small scale farming; money or skills in fundraising.

We would like to hear from people currently working for the related State bodies who would have a personal interest in the development of this project. We would also like to hear from people involved with other organisations in County Leitrim. If short, if you have an interest in any aspect of the above, please get in touch.

Crann is offering the resource of its office at Aughavas, along with the information and contacts gathered over the last five years. This project will be the main focus of our work in the time ahead. Please contact Mary Holohan or Jan Alexander at Crann, Aughavas, via Carrick Co Leitrim. Telephone: 078 3602

Anyone in the bordering counties of Roscommon, Fermanagh, Carrick Longford or Sligo who would like to become involved in anyway involved of course you're welcome.

- A Noel Sweeney, Breege Sullivan and John Milton with the Annie Martin Memorial Trophy for the best kept area (Aghadark/Ardrum) during Ballinamore Festival Week.
- B Lead singer Patricia Dolan in a scene from Calamity Jane produced by Ballinamore Music Society in April.
- C Ballinamore Icebreakers take to the waters of Garadice Lake in atrocious weather conditions last Christmas Day. The swim was in aid of the Leitrim Branch of the National Council for the Blind.
- D Mr Gerrey Mahon NT presents the Betty Bohan Memorial Trophy to Paul Bohan, the winning captain in the festival Competition at Ballinamore in August.
- E Mr Tony O'Beime presents the O'Beime Trophy to Patricia Griffin, Ballinamore AC, to mark the club's fourth successive victory in the Leitrim Road League. Also in picture are County Board officials Mary Talor, Joe Doonan and PJ Leddy.
- F Ms Anne Siebert of the French Cultural Institute, Ms Maura Clancy, native of Ballinaglera Department of Education, Lisa Cryan of St. Felim's College, Ballinamore (winning school) and Mr M Ropert, French Cultural Attache, at the presentation of the French Radio Tape Awards in the Teachers Centre Carrick on Shannon, last May. The competition, open to post primary schools in Longford, Leitrim and Roscommon was sponsored by the French Cultural Institute and the Department of Education and won by the Leaving Certificate Class at St. Felim's
- G Philip Murphy (left) and James Doonan in a scene from Tarry Flynn produced by Ballinamore Dramatic Society in June.
- H Mr Pat Hickey, President of the Olympic Council of Ireland, Mr Padraic Griffin (author), Mr Robert Molloy TD, Minister for Energy and Mr Bobby Begley President of BLE, at the launch of The Politics of Irish Athletics 1850-1990 by Mr Molloy in Dublin.