

TALKING **TIMBER**

STANDARDS LIFE

Vic Kearley looks at the career of another of wood science's 'unsung heroes', John Dinwoodie



Professor John Dinwoodie, OBE, well known and respected in the worlds of wood science, timber research and standardisation, is perhaps less well known to the timber trade; John has had a major input in the development of wood science and in particular to the field of wood-based panels and their supporting European standards.

John graduated with honours in Forestry from the University of Aberdeen in 1957. In 1958 he

began three years of research into the variation in tracheid cell length in Sitka spruce as he took up the post of assistant lecturer in forestry.

The award of his PhD was followed by his appointment as junior research fellow at the Forest Products Research Laboratory (FPRL) in Princes Risborough; working for four years on the pulping properties of Sitka spruce he eventually joined the full-time staff.

In 1964 he transferred to the Wood Anatomy Section, a role that brought access to state-of-the-art transmission and scanning electron microscopes, which he used extensively to study the behaviour of timber as it was stressed. In 1969 he undertook a prolonged study tour across North America.

Inspired by developments in materials science and their potential application to timber, John took a three-year part-time MTech course at Brunel University. Before he had the opportunity to apply his new skills at FPRL, he was whisked off to South America to assist the Brazilian government in setting up a timber laboratory in Manaus, a role that involved using his experience to appraise equipment requirements, costs and to develop a project plan.

On return to the UK he took charge of FPRL's research into the properties of wood-based panels, a subject that came to dominate much of his later career. One of his specialisms was the effect of duration of load on the deflection behaviour (creep) of wood-based panels and the influence of climatic conditions upon this behaviour. His work was of great significance in the development of the UK timber design code, BS 5268: Part 2 and, in collaboration with other researchers around Europe, Eurocode 5, now EN 1995-1-1.

Somewhere along the line, John also found time to write over 150 research papers and three textbooks on wood science and technology. His research and publications earned him a DSc from Aberdeen, the Sir Stuart Mallinson Gold Medal in 1985 and subsequently an OBE, before being made an Honorary Professor at the University of Bangor in 1994.

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John's first 'retirement' came in 1995, but shortly afterwards, appointed to represent the UK on committees dealing with the development of new European Standards for wood-based panels, he became very involved in the development of product standards and test methods for chipboard, fibreboard and OSB. Becoming convenor of two committees, he travelled extensively across Europe as representatives of each of the CEN member countries sought to reach agreement on the common set of EN standards.

These were challenging times. Meetings required tremendous tact and diplomacy with many conflicting opinions being aired. Some subjects were revisited repeatedly at successive meetings, but somehow agreement was always reached ... eventually!

After more than 45 influential years, John's second retirement was in 2005. Although he was widely recognised for his scientific achievements in the first part of his career, his post-retirement work on codes and standards was undertaken quietly and diligently and largely went unrecognised. The importance of his input to the suite of panel product standards that we now utilise cannot be over-emphasised, and for that alone I think John can truly be considered as one of our 'unsung heroes'. ■

Below Prof John Dinwoodie was instrumental in the development of many codes and standards

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