

Aeneas Higgins

1936 – 2018

News of Aeneas Higgins's sudden death, in his 83rd year, while out for his daily walk on 12th December, shocked everyone in the world of Irish forestry. A hugely popular figure in forestry circles, Aeneas exuded a wonderfully calm and calming aura. He was a polite and urbane gentleman of the old school, who managed to achieve much without imposing on people's time or schedules. He served as President of this Society from 2003 to 2005.



Aeneas was born on 13th March 1936 into a farming family at Tiernakill, Maam, Co. Galway to Thomas and Mary Higgins (né Joyce). He was the youngest of three boys, Michael and Martin, who also died earlier in the year. Aeneas, a somewhat unusual first name in Ireland, is a Higgins family name. As he often pointed out, he was frequently asked to explain his Ionian connections. True to the Greek origins of that name, Aeneas spent a significant portion of his retirement living in Crete.

He began his forestry education on 28th March 1956 at Kinnitty Castle, Co. Offaly and completed it at Shelton Abbey Forestry College in Co. Wicklow. On 1st December 1958 Aeneas took up his first appointment which was at Ballybofey Forest, Co. Donegal. He made his way to Ballybofey by train and he enjoyed telling the story of his circuitous train journey, which took him on the Dublin - Belfast line where he changed at Portadown for Omagh and then Strabane and finally, onwards to Stranolar in Co. Donegal. A victim of progress, the entire rail-line from Portadown across to Stranolar has now disappeared. He remained there until 1964 when he was transferred to Dungarvan, Co. Waterford to take up duty as forester in charge of Commeragh forest. It was here that he met his future wife, Susan Curran from Portlaw. They married in 1967 and celebrated their golden jubilee in 2017 shortly before Susan passed away.

In 1970, Aeneas moved to Roundwood Co. Wicklow as forester in charge. He then moved to Bray when he became forester in charge at Glencree Forest. In 1993 he was promoted to the post of Regional Environmental Office - a post he retained until he retired in 2001. It was in this latter role that Aeneas really shone. He was a great listener and this rare quality coupled with his calm and sincere disposition, successfully defused many difficult and volatile encounters with environmental groups.

Aeneas was a committed, life-long member of the Society of Irish Foresters. He served on the Council as a Technical Councillor initially, then as Vice President

2001-2003 and ultimately as President 2003-2005. To this important role, he brought the skills and qualities he had honed during his career to bear on the society. He exuded honesty, integrity and fairness. He treated everyone with great courtesy but this was not to be taken as a weakness as he also possessed a steely determination – a prerequisite for a successful president! In his professional life, Aeneas was an excellent silviculturalist and a top-class forester. Every task he undertook was completed to perfection. He ensured that all forest operations were carried out to the prescribed standard and achieved all this without fuss or bother. Aeneas possessed a great wealth of knowledge and experience which he shared generously.

He had many interests outside of forestry. These included natural history, archaeology, history and travel, but his beloved gardens in Crete and Ireland were among his principal diversions. Here he would happily spend hours on end acquiring new plants, pruning, weeding and tidying - no matter what the weather. He loved to read and be up to date with current affairs. Aeneas always had an opinion but did not impose it. Instead he merely used it to begin a conversation. Unlike many of his generation, Aeneas embraced technology with great enthusiasm and had recently booked all of his flights “on-line” (!) for three trips to Crete in 2019.

Aeneas was kind, honest, compassionate, a gentleman of the highest integrity. He didn't speak very much but when he did people tended to listen and to take heed. He always commanded the respect of his colleagues and friends. In describing Aeneas, one can do no better than quote from his funeral Mass wherein he was described as “cultured, dignified and modest.”

He was predeceased by his wife Susan in November 2017. To his daughter Lorraine and his son Crevan, his grandchildren Robert, Daniel, Donnacha and Oisín and his brother Michael, we offer our sincere sympathy.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam uasal.

Tim O'Regan