



## Obituary

### **Robert Tottenham** **1925 – 2007**

Robert Tottenham who died in April 2007 was a champion of Irish private sector forestry. His forest at Mount Callan, near Inagh in Co Clare, which he and his family established almost entirely on wet farmland and mountain, became and remains a symbol of the transfer of emphasis from state to privately-owned forest in Ireland. He believed passionately in forestry and its potential to deliver economic benefits to owners and the wider rural community.

Robert was instrumental in the formation of the Irish Timber Growers Association, and served on its executive and as chairman for many years. A long term member of the council of the Society of Irish Foresters, he strongly advocated its expansion to attract more members from the private sector, especially forest owning farmers, forest workers and forestry contractors.

He loved to share his experiences and knowledge of forestry. Through his generosity of time, Mount Callan became a regular stop on student tours, visits from foreign forestry organisations, field days and study tours. He was always available to discuss his ideas on forest management and to pass on his experience. A mentor to many farm forest owners in his native Clare and beyond, those who sought his advice continued to seek out his company, as Robert had a gift of finding fun and sometimes devilment in all matters, no matter how serious.

Robert became renowned in Irish forestry for his policy of early, intensive and frequent thinning which he practised at Mount Callan, and which resulted in rapid volume increment of the remaining stems. He used this practice in conjunction with deep drainage as a means of engendering stability in stands where windthrow would otherwise be expected.

It is likely that Robert's most enduring legacy to Irish forestry will be his discovery of the European Pro Silva movement, and its advocacy of continuous cover forestry. He was subsequently instrumental in the formation of Pro Silva Ireland, of which he was the founding chairman. In an almost Pauline conversion to continuous cover, he sought out experts in the area throughout Europe, and assembled groups from Ireland to visit them and their forests. Experts were invited back to Ireland to advise on how best Irish forests might be transformed from monoculture plantations to permanent forests.

Irish forestry is poorer for the loss of Robert Tottenham, his mistrust of authority, his love of people, his cheeky smile, his inquisitive eye, the open shirt, the dog whistle around his neck and springer spaniel at his side. Robert is survived by his wife Jane and sons Robin, Fred and George.

*Paddy Purser*