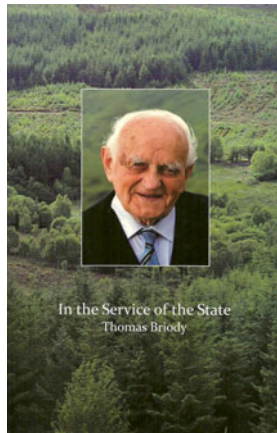


In the Service of the State – The Memoirs of an Irish Forester

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In the Service of the State by Tom Briody was launched by Donal Magner on 14th October 2012, two weeks before Tom's 99th birthday. It was a very happy occasion, attended by a large group of Tom's family and friends, at which the Society of Irish Foresters presented Tom with a specially minted medal to commemorate his being the sole surviving Foundation Member of the Society. Unfortunately, Tom Briody died shortly afterwards, on 23 November in his 100th year, and his obituary can be found elsewhere in this volume.

In the first volume of his memoirs, *The Road to Avondale* (2009), Tom recounted the story of his childhood in south-west Cavan, his path to forestry and his first few years as a forester. The second volume of his memoirs, *In the Service of the State*, takes up his story where *The Road to Avondale* left off. It tells of his transfer to the Slieve Blooms from Slievenamon, his marriage to Nora O'Hickey from Portlaw, and their life together up to Tom's retirement from forestry in early 1979. The story of their first home in the Slieve Blooms introduces a theme which is repeated throughout the book, i.e. the poor quality of foresters' housing. He describes the absence of the most basic of facilities, such as running water, an indoor toilet and proper cooking facilities. Electricity was rarely connected. Tom's descriptions give us a vivid impression of life during and after the Second World War where everything from bicycle tyres to fuel was scarce. All these problems were exacerbated by frequent transfers, which appeared to take no account of family or other domestic problems.

From the Slieve Blooms the family was transferred to Mount Bellew in east Galway; from there to Castleblayney, Co. Monaghan and thence to Foxford Forest

in east Mayo. From Foxford he was transferred to Carrick-on-Suir. He was to spend the last 18 years of his forestry career in Carrick. Not surprisingly, Carrick looms large in this volume, but the trials and tribulations encountered at the other forest centres are also described in detail.

Carrick-on-Suir, at that time, was one of the largest transmission pole producing forests in the country. Tom describes the production process in fine detail and the significant economic contribution this enterprise made to forestry and to the country. Sadly it appears to be all in the past tense as Douglas fir is no longer an important component of our forests and all transmission poles are now imported.

Tom thought constantly of his forests. In the book he describes taking a half day leave to visit the dentist. The dentist had just numbed his gums when Tom, who had a view of the forest from the dentist's chair, saw a fire on the hill. He immediately abandoned the dentist's chair and headed straight for the fire, fully numbed! Tom's extraordinary dedication to duty is brilliantly captured in this vignette and many others throughout the book.

In the Service of State should have a wide appeal, and not just for people interested in forestry in pre-Coillte days. It tells a very human story, of the constant struggle to raise and educate a large family; of great personal sacrifice; of unbending attitudes in certain quarters of the Civil Service. Today's civil servants and politicians would do well to read this book and get an appreciation of the sacrifices that were made in developing Ireland's forest industry.

As I noted in the review of the first volume, the reader is left with the impression that Tom remained a positive and happy man despite all the ups and downs in life. He felt he achieved a lot "for his country" during his career as a forester. Both volumes of Tom's memoirs make a huge contribution to our knowledge of how this valuable natural resource took shape. We are indebted to Tom, and his son Dr Micheál Briody who edited both volumes, and completed such a wonderful job in making them accessible to a wider audience. In thanking Micheál, Tom describes how he carried him on his shoulders when he was a child, but that now Micheál was helping him to write his memoirs and fulfil the dreams of an old man.

The inclusion of a very comprehensive index helps one to navigate easily throughout the book. Let us hope that other foresters may now settle down with their pen or laptop to record their memoirs. Tom Briody has left us an excellent template.

John Mc Loughlin

John McLoughlin is Business Editor of the Society of Irish Foresters and Chairman of The Tree Register of Ireland.