

## Tom Briody 1913 – 2012

The sight of two aeroplanes flying over the townland of Callanagh near Mullahoran was Tom Briody's earliest recollection of his Co. Cavan childhood. The planes swooped so low that he could "actually see the occupants". The terror stricken three-year-old recalled his father shouting, "the Germans have arrived." This event occurred in the spring of 1917, when World War I was still raging. The incident, recalled by Tom in the opening lines of the first volume of his memoirs, is the beginning of a remarkable story; all the more remarkable since he only began recording it as he approached his 90<sup>th</sup> year. There is something heroic about this late-conceived project, which gave him a new energy when a lesser mortal might have succumbed, especially after his beloved wife Nora died in November 2000.



His memoirs began with sketches of family life during his youth in Mullahoran, Co. Cavan but, encouraged by his son Michéal, a story began to unfold that is an indispensable element of Ireland's 20<sup>th</sup> century forestry narrative. Like many foresters, he came from a farming background and this aspect of his childhood and early teens dominated the early section of his first volume *The Road to Avondale: The Memoirs of an Irish Forester*. It is a study of survival and resourcefulness especially by his mother, Annie, who was major influence in his life. His background influenced his decision to pursue a career in agriculture. He entered Ballyhaise Agricultural College in 1936 followed by the Albert College, Glasnevin in 1937. He finally decided on a career in forestry as the "road to horticulture had become bleak".

A common theme among foresters of his generation was a need to justify their decision to take up forestry, especially to their families who were frequently unsympathetic towards the profession. His mother's blessing was important to him as he explains in *The Road to Avondale*. "She it was who had initially helped me to identify the various farm and bog weeds. She had taught me the magic of seed sowing. She it was who had taught me the wizardry of matching the various colours in the flower garden." He won his mother around and entered the forestry school in Avondale in 1937 and qualified in 1940. After qualifying, he was appointed as forest foreman in Kilsheelan, Co. Tipperary and forester-in-charge in Slievenamon, where he operated the Emergency Fuel Scheme during the Second World War.

*In the Service of the State*, the second volume of his memoirs, several facets of his life are combined, especially his role as a forester along with insights to local and national events. It also recalls his family life and circumstances. In this regard the book is a tribute to his wife Nora and how she coped with life as a forester's wife, which involved frequent transfers at short notice when the family criss-crossed the country, often living in conditions, which were poor even for the time. He served

as forester in all four provinces, from Slievenamon to Clonaslee and Mountbellew and on to Castleblaney and Foxford, before his final destination in Carrick-on-Suir.

Tom was acknowledged for his expertise in establishing and managing forests. He was one of the founding members of the Society of Irish Foresters in September 1942. His lifelong commitment to the profession of forestry was properly and formally acknowledged in 2009 when he was conferred with Honorary Membership of the Society.

His approach to forest protection, especially to fire control in high risk forests such as Foxford, was an exercise in total commitment to forestry. His approach to timber production and marketing, especially during “The Emergency” when timber was in short supply, was a master class in resourcefulness and innovation.

He was also a humane forester and possessed a deep understanding and empathy with forest workers and the numerous assistant foresters who worked with him over the years. He was at ease in their company and even with the officials who, at times, made life difficult for him and his family with their overzealous approach to transferring foresters. In this regard, his outlook was well captured by his son Michéal when he paid the final tribute to Tom at his funeral Mass in Carrick-on-Suir: “My father forgave those who hurt him and did not hold grudges for very long.”

Sadly, Tom passed away on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2012 in his 100<sup>th</sup> year, and two weeks after the launch of the second volume of his memoirs, which I had the honour to launch. The forestry community and the State are indebted to him for his achievements over the years, not least for recording what it was like to be a forester at the birth of Irish forestry and to shape its development for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His memoirs have brought this important period in Irish forestry alive to a whole new generation.

Predeceased by his wife Nora (nee O’Hickey), daughter Geraldine and son Eamonn, he is survived by his daughters Joan, Anne and Máire, and sons Tomás, Mattie and Michéal to whom we offer our deepest sympathy.

*Beannacht Dé leis agus le hanamacha na marbh.*

Donal Magner