

Cecil Kilpatrick 1921 – 2013

Cecil Stephen Kilpatrick passed away peacefully at home aged 92 on 8th October, 2013 surrounded by his family who had cared for him tenderly over recent years. His funeral was held in St James's Church, Lower Kilwarlin, close to his home near Hillsborough, Co. Down.

Cecil was born at Portballintrae, Co. Antrim on the 14th April, 1921. His father was a teacher and he had a brother and two sisters. He attended the local schools and then as a teenager expressed an interest in a career in the army. As a result his father decided in 1937 to send him as a boarder to Campbell College in Belfast as it had a well known Combined Cadet Force.

Following the outbreak of war in 1939, Cecil joined the Royal Engineers and served in India and Burma. At the end of the war in 1945 he retired from the army with the rank of Major.

He then decided on a career in forestry. With an ex-service training grant he enrolled on a forestry degree course at Edinburgh University and graduated three years later in 1949. He obviously did not spend all his time on studies as he met a fellow student, June Thomson, who was to become his wife. On hearing of their engagement, June's mother earnestly enquired "Was there not a man in the whole of Scotland good enough for you?"

Shortly after graduation Cecil was recruited in December, 1949 to the Forest Service in Northern Ireland and was posted in 1950 as District Forest Officer to Co. Down and Armagh, based in Newcastle. He was closely involved in the development of the first Forest Park in Northern Ireland at Tollymore, which opened on 2nd June, 1955. Prior to this, virtually all forests were out of bounds to the public except on business. During the 1960s a further four forest parks were opened at Gortin Glen, Castlewellan, Gosford and Drum Manor. These were all extremely popular with the public.

In 1957 Cecil was promoted and transferred to Headquarters in Belfast as Deputy Chief Forest Officer. Just four years later, on 16th September 1961, Hurricane Debbie devastated 8% of state forests over 20 years of age. This created an increase in the workload of staff at all levels. In his new post Cecil had responsibility for Private Forestry, Conservation and Wildlife Management in the Forest Service. He was keen to ensure that the forests were managed for multiple uses - not only for timber but for recreation, conservation, wildlife and education. He introduced District Conservation Committees and liaised with voluntary conservation organisations and the Department of the Environment to improve conservation within forests. Areas of significant conservation value were designated either as Forest or National Nature Reserves. In 1971 the Forest Service celebrated the planting of its 100,000th acre. Cecil had a particular interest in wildlife



management within forests and he was influential in the development of the Irish Deer Society. He served as its President in 1981 and 1982.

Cecil was promoted to Chief Forest Officer in 1977 and served in this post with distinction until his retirement in 1983. It was always a pleasure to work with him and he valued and encouraged his staff at all levels. With the election of Mrs Thatcher's Conservative Government in 1979, another cold wind struck the Forest Service! The future emphasis was to be on commercial forestry and a progressive reduction in spending of 5% per annum. An incentive scheme was introduced for the industrial workers and a reduction in the technical and professional staff. Cecil's six year period as Chief Forest Officer was not a bed of roses!

In 1985, a conference was held to celebrate 75 years of State forestry. Cecil was invited back to give a lecture on the history of forestry during this period and he held his large audience enthralled. This lecture was in fact the summary of a book written by Cecil and published by the Forest Service in 1987. The title of the book was '*Northern Ireland Forest Service – A History.*' Unfortunately, this book is currently out of print.

Cecil was the first member of the Forest Service of Northern Ireland staff to join the Society of Irish Foresters and served as its President in 1966 and 1967. In this latter capacity he once received a letter from India addressed to him as "President of Ireland"! Later, in 1992, he was awarded Honorary Membership of the Society.

Cecil was a man with wide interests which included Irish history, gardening, wine making and bee keeping. He was also a great supporter of St. James's Parish Church where he served for many years as Treasurer and Church Warden. Above all, he was a very devoted family man. He and June were married for 64 years and we extend our deepest sympathy to her, to their daughters Wendy, Elizabeth Anne, Gillian, Christine and Freya and to their son Stephen.

Bill Wright