

## Brendan J. Collins 1929 - 2015

Brendan Collins passed away peacefully on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2015 in his 87<sup>th</sup> year. He was born on 9 February 1929 to Patrick, a Department of Agriculture employee and Delia (nee Marren) in Ballymote, Co. Sligo. He received his primary and secondary education in Ballymote. Prior to commencing his studies at Avondale he attended Pallaskenry and Athenry Agricultural Colleges.



Brendan began his forestry career at Avondale Forestry School in November 1950 and when he graduated in 1953 he was appointed an assistant forester in Dungarvan, Co. Waterford. This was followed by a sojourn in Emo, Co. Laois before taking up the management of a newly created forest at Castledaly, Co. Galway in the summer of 1956. Writing in “A Social History of Forestry in Ireland” which was published in 2000 by Crainn Publications, Brendan describes in admirable detail the official opening of the new forest at Castledaly. The opening ceremony was attended by several dignitaries including the Minister for Lands, Joe Blowick and the then Bishop of Galway, Dr Browne. There was a reception afterwards in Glynn’s Hotel in nearby Gort. It is a testament to Brendan’s humanity that, writing this article almost 50 years later, he still bemoaned the fact that the two local foresters, Tom Cox and Tom Finnegan, had not been invited to this reception. H.J. Gray, the Establishment Officer, apologised to both men afterwards explaining that it was due to an oversight on his part. (For the benefit of our younger readers, the Establishment Officer was the precursor of the Personnel Officer, who later metamorphosed into today’s Human Resource Manager).

The early 1950s were hungry days and rural employment was scarce and eagerly sought after. Brendan describes how he initially hired five workers from the Employment Exchange in Gort to begin the large planting programme at Castledaly. However, on the following Monday morning twelve extra men turned up seeking work - such was the hunger for steady employment in rural areas at that time. The disappointed newcomers became aggressive and Brendan was forced to cancel operations for the day. The following day an even larger group of 25 men arrived at the forest gate, all demanding work on the planting site! However, over time Brendan was able to employ more and more men and eventually built up a proud team of well trained forestry workers in Castledaly. In 1961, Brendan was transferred to Killeshandra, Co. Cavan and while there he was instrumental in establishing Killykeen Forest Park.

In 1969 Brendan was conferred with the National Diploma in Forestry (NDF), one of the few people in the Republic of Ireland to achieve this distinction. The National

Diploma in Forestry was awarded by the Central Forestry Examination Board of the United Kingdom and was taught in Forestry Commission schools. Holders of the NDF were accepted as qualifying for Associate Membership of the Institute of Chartered Foresters.

Brendan was soon promoted to the post of Assistant District Inspector in Portlaoise where he worked with John O'Connell. Both of these fine foresters strove wholeheartedly to promote the professional management and development of forests in the Slieve Bloom Mountains and their efforts have bequeathed us some of the finest and most productive forests in the country. After a sojourn of nine years Brendan was transferred on promotion to Galway city to the post of Work Study Inspector. He had a particular interest in Method Study as it applied to forest operations and while in Galway he played a major role in the computerisation of the accounting system in the Galway Division. When Coillte was set up in January 1989, Brendan became the Regional Accountant in Galway and worked in this capacity until his retirement on 31<sup>st</sup> January 1993. This final move was a convincing testament of his flexibility and adaptability in a fast changing work environment.

The enthusiasm and zeal which Brendan displayed throughout his career was a wonderful example to the many young foresters and forest workers who came in contact with him over the course of his long career. Above all else, Brendan was a man of the highest integrity who was respected by, and respectful of, all he encountered. He was always good company and, while most conscientious about the job at hand, the rigours of many a long working day had their lighter moments which Brendan would punctuate with a good hearty laugh. Brendan was a great family man and his passing leaves this world a lesser place for all who knew him, but especially for his family whom he adored.

He had a lifelong interest in trees and forestry education. In 1975, he visited Sequoia National Park in California and his subsequent report was published in *Irish Forestry*, Vol. 32 No. 2, 1975. After his retirement in 1993, Brendan dedicated much of his time to voluntary roles in both the Active Retirement Association and Parish Social Club, but it was in his beloved garden that he spent many happy hours honing and refining his encyclopaedic knowledge of horticulture and silviculture. Brendan maintained a keen interest in the Society of Irish Foresters and all things to do with forestry until he passed away peacefully earlier this year.

To his wife Mary, his daughters Majella, Hilary, Maura and Barbara, his son Pat, sisters Fidelma and Carmel and brother Dermot we offer our sincere sympathy.

*“Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis.”*

Tom Kavanagh