

Denis Hayes 1915 - 2012

The second eldest of four children of Bartholomew and Kate, Denis Hayes was born in Glandore, Co. Cork on 22nd October 1915. His mother died when he was only 12 years old, but his was a happy childhood. He enjoyed the affection of his aunt and relatives as he helped out in the family farm and the pub/grocery shop in the village of Glandore. Denis went to the local national school before boarding in Rochestown College and Ballyfin College, Co. Laois where he completed his Leaving Certificate in 1934.



There was some family opposition to his announcement that he was opting for a career in forestry especially as he had already secured a teaching post at a private secondary school in Dunmanway. They relented however and after successfully completing the written and oral forestry exams, he entered Avondale Forestry School on 5th February, 1936.

His supervisor Danny McGlynn – who had also left a teaching post – advised him to reconsider his decision. He tendered his resignation but his fellow students convinced him to stay, which he did, and so began a career that lasted 44 years.

The training in Avondale was tough and covered a range of operations including nursery work, planting, pruning and harvesting before he was transferred on work experience to the fledgling forests of Aughrim, the Glen of Imaal, Cootehill and Cappoquin Forest.

Back to Avondale for his final year he received lectures from Alistair Grant. He also recounts visits to Avondale by two directors of forestry in Ireland during this period – the Scottish forester Mark Loudon Anderson and Otto Reinhard a former Oberforstmeister in the Prussian Forest Service.

After successfully completing the course in Avondale he began his life as a forester in Athlone in July 1939 and within a year he was transferred to Ballinasloe. For the next few years, he involved in felling and extracting firewood during World War II. He fell into ill health for a time and often praised Anderson who recommended a period in a forest close to good hospitals. As a result he was transferred to Donadea in September 1946. By now he had settled down to married life with Kathleen (nee Marsh) whom he met in Athlone and married in 1943.

In November 1951, he was transferred to Durrow, Co Laois where he lived with his young family in an isolated dilapidated house deep in the forest. During this time he became acutely aware of the poor living accommodation and subsistence wages paid to foresters. Angered by the negative responses of the Department to submissions made on behalf of foresters in relation to pay, living accommodation and transfers he became actively involved in the then State Foresters Association (SFA).

The work of the SFA began to bear fruit during the 1950s when foresters were eventually granted Established status. The breakthrough finally came when the Department of Lands (Establishment of Foresters) Bill, 1952 was finally enacted in May 1953.

This meant that foresters were established Civil Servants which ensured that we had full pensionability and that their families would be cared for in the event of death or injury. He recalled in later years: “It is difficult to imagine it now, but achieving Established status made a huge difference to the morale and financial standing of foresters, in addition to granting a new-found status to our profession.”

In 1961, Denis was appointed Assistant District Inspector in Kilkenny. He moved house for the last time to Kilkenny with his family. His final appointment as District Inspector (DI) in Kilkenny was a role he thoroughly enjoyed.

In this position he was a farsighted forester and enjoyed tremendous loyalty of foresters in his district. He was a founding member of the Society of Irish Foresters and encouraged debate and dialogue on all forestry issues. He was a strong proponent of commercial forestry but the wide range of soil types in Kilkenny provided opportunities to practice multipurpose forestry and species diversity.

Denis retired in 1980 but continued his interest in forestry. Up to a year of his passing, he wrote letters to the press opposing the privatisation of Coillte forests. He outlined the many benefits of State forestry and said in one letter that it “would be inconceivable to contemplate that any government would consider selling such a valuable asset for short-term financial gain”. He understood well the hardship and struggle to create this rich resource, which he played such a major role in establishing.

Predeceased by his wife Kathleen, he is survived by Catriona and Declan to whom we offer our deepest sympathy.

Donal Magner