

Obituaries

Thomas Peter Damien (Tom) Hunt 1932–2016

On 21st November 2016 at St. Francis's Hospice, Blanchardstown, Tom Hunt passed away peacefully in his 85th year after a protracted illness which, as one would expect of the man, he bore with great fortitude.

Tom was born, the youngest of four siblings, on 25th February 1932 into a farming family at Corrigeenrore, Boyle, Co. Roscommon to Thomas and Mary (née Mc Loughlin). He received his primary education locally at Knockvicar National School and his secondary education at Summerhill College, Sligo. Like his siblings before him, Tom won a scholarship to attend this boarding college.



He began his forestry training at Avondale Forestry School, Co. Wicklow on 3rd January 1951. On completion of his studies, in September 1954, he was appointed as Assistant Forester to Head Forester, John Doyle, in Killarney, Co. Kerry. Later he was assigned to Mountrath, Co. Laois where he spent three years and from there he was transferred to Ballymahon, Co. Longford. In 1959, he was transferred again, this time to Co. Mayo where he was appointed a research forester with responsibility for organising the field-work to establish experimental forest plots and subsequent assessment of their performance. Tom was responsible for laying down the important peatland experiments at Glenamoy Forest, Co. Mayo.

Tom married Clare McNamara from Thurles, whom he met while in Mountrath, Co. Laois and they set up their first home (the first of 14 homes!) at Bangor Erris, Co. Mayo, later moving to Castlebar. In 1964, he was promoted as Forester Grade 2 and transferred to Tinahely Forest and Nursery in Co. Wicklow. In August 1969, he was promoted to the role of Forestry Inspector, Grade 3, and assigned to Avondale House – just in time for its reopening as Avondale Forestry Extension School.

Tom had purchased a house site some 10 miles from Avondale. However, the then Chief Inspector was so annoyed at this that he transferred him to the Wicklow District, whereupon he resided in Wicklow Town. The Chief Inspector was insistent that Tom should live closer to Avondale as he was concerned about the newly appointed young matron and her domestic staff, particularly since it was proposed to open a bar on

the premises. It seems that he had expected Tom to act as a moral enforcer for the Department! In any case, fate intervened and the crisis was averted because the bar never opened. It is reported that the Establishment Officer (Human Resource Manager in today's parlance) was not too pleased when he noticed Tom distributing bottles of stout to forest workers on the day of the official opening. Tom was well aware of the Trojan work these men had done to ensure that the grounds of Avondale House were in pristine condition for the official opening and, being a fair-minded man, he felt they deserved some acknowledgement and recognition for their efforts.

In 1970, Tom was transferred to Sligo as a Method Study Inspector. Here, he worked with Benny Maloney (a former Coillte director and father of its current Chairman) who was then a Work Study Inspector. In 1978 he was promoted to the role of Forestry Inspector, Grade 2, and assigned to the Cork Division as Method Study Inspector. On reflection, one could scarcely conceive a more appropriate role for the man as he was most precise, diligent, meticulous and exacting in everything he did. In 1986, in his final career move, he was assigned to the Cork District as District Inspector. Tom availed of early retirement on 31st January 1991.

Tom was an intelligent, amiable, and most amenable forester who carried lightly his profound knowledge of scientific and practical forestry and nursery practice. He will be remembered by his many friends and colleagues as an outstanding forester and nursery manager and above all, a man of immense personal integrity.

Tom served on the executive committee of the State Foresters Association (SFA) for many years and also served as its Treasurer. He was a tireless worker in helping to improve the terms and conditions of his fellow foresters. This was no easy task at that time as the dead hand of Civil Service regulation often curbed the innovation and energy of Tom and his colleagues.

In the early days of his retirement he travelled abroad extensively. However, ill health curtailed his travels in later years. He was a very charitable man and devoted many years of his life to charitable causes. He was a marriage guidance counsellor for more than twenty years and was a member of the St. Vincent de Paul organisation. He treated all this work in a very confidential manner and very few knew of his involvement.

Throughout his career as a forester, Tom was a committed member of the Society of Irish Foresters and during his long association with the Society, he attended many events at home and abroad. His last study tour was to British Columbia in 2000.

Tom was predeceased by his son Paddy. To his wife Clare, sons Francis and Adrian and daughters Máire and Áine we offer our sincere sympathy.

'Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dilis.'

Michael O'Donovan