

## Peter Alley 1941-2016

Peter Alley, one of Ireland's best known foresters and nurserymen, passed away peacefully on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2016 at the Hermitage Medical Clinic, Dublin following a long illness which, as one would expect of the man, he bore bravely.

Peter was born in Durrow, Co. Laois on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1941 to John Alley and Cathy (née Lacey). He was educated at Durrow National School, St Kieran's College, Kilkenny and the Patrician College, Ballyfin, Co. Laois.



He began his forestry career in November 1959 at Kinnitty Castle Forestry College in Co. Offaly and completed his training at Shelton Abbey, Co. Wicklow in August 1962. On completion of his forestry studies, he was appointed forester at Ossory Forest, Co. Laois. Subsequently he was transferred to Bandon Forest, Co. Cork and from there he was transferred to Research Branch with headquarters in Mountrath, Co. Laois. After this, he spent short periods in Portlaoise and Urlingford Forests before being transferred to Ox Mountain Forest, Co. Sligo in February 1970 as a forester-in-charge. In August 1973 Peter moved again to take up the post of sawmill manager at Dundrum Sawmill, Co. Tipperary. This was his last cross country move. His final post before retiring was as forester-in-charge at the adjacent Hollyford Forest where he was based for three years.

In January 1988 Peter made his break and retired from the Forest Service. Once free of the shackles he threw himself, with typical gusto, into the development of the first class Dundrum Nurseries together with a forestry company, Forestry Services Ltd, with its two subsidiary companies – Sár Caman Teo and Red Squirrel Forestry Services which between them provided a complete service for landowners.

Peter will be remembered by a generation of foresters as a tenacious union official. During the 1960s, the foresters' terms and conditions of employment were poor; their pay was low relative to similar Civil Service grades, the grading structure had become dysfunctional leading to very limited promotional opportunities, the forester transfer system was unfair, illogical and frequently perceived as vindictive, official housing was inadequate and did not meet the needs of married foresters and their families.

The State Foresters Association (SFA) carefully managed the pent-up anger and frustration of its membership and in time a younger cohort of members was elected onto its Executive Committee. Peter waded into this battleground with great passion and fire. He was sharp, skilful and radical, a fiery orator and a dogged and tenacious negotiator who took few prisoners at the table. The negotiation table was the scene of many lively battles between the official side (Forest Service) and the SFA. However,

in due course, wise counsel prevailed and the long awaited 1972 Agreement was finalised and signed by both parties.

This agreement introduced a revised grading structure which provided more promotional opportunities and better pay for foresters and the annual intake of forestry trainees was reduced. Most importantly, the dreaded “transfer system” was replaced by an application process for newly created and existing vacant posts. Foresters could now purchase or build a house in a location of their choice. Peter Alley had many significant achievements in his lifetime but his work for the State Foresters Association is hugely appreciated by foresters of his generation.

There was another interesting side to Peter’s life. He was the producer of several acclaimed “Musicals” - which he referred to as “the joy of his life”. He began with the local church choir, progressed to annual “Pantomimes” and finally, graduated to the “Musicals”. His first production was *My Fair Lady* and this was followed in quick succession by *Oklahoma*, *Oliver*, *South Pacific* and *Carousel*. These, and many more, were organised by Peter and the members of St. Oliver’s Musical Society between 1976 and 1984. However, Peter enjoyed one final hooray when, in 2010, he produced an open-air *Oklahoma* for the parish of Boherlahan Dualla in the local GAA field. It was a resounding success which is still talked about in the locality.

In his later years, despite his long battle with ill health, Peter found the time and energy to write a book entitled *My Way* which was published in 2013. It is a compelling read, which recounts the story of this versatile man of many parts who left a lasting legacy wherever he went.

To his wife Josie, whom he describes in the book as his goalkeeper, full-back, midfielder and attacking forward line, and to his children Sean, Frank, Siobhan, Bobby, Gráinne, Ray and Marguerite, we offer our sincere sympathy.

*Thanks for the memories Pete.*

John Moore