

Jim Neilan 1933-2016

On 8th July 2016 Jim Neilan, one of Ireland's best known nursery foresters, passed away peacefully at his home in Wicklow Town.

He was born, the second eldest of four children and the only boy, in Athleague, Co. Roscommon on 13th May 1933 to Michael Neilan and Brigid (née Garrick). After both his parents passed away at relatively young ages, Jim left Athleague in 1955 to pursue a career in forestry.

His group was the first to enter Kinnitty Castle Forestry College, Co. Offaly, he then moved to Avondale House because the extensive refurbishment works at Shelton Abbey were not complete. These works were necessary because the accommodation at Avondale House was unable to cater for the larger groups of foresters required to manage the increased afforestation programmes of the 1950s and 1960s. Jim completed his course at Shelton Abbey in 1958. Always keen on education, he completed a Masters degree in forestry 40 years later in 1998 and had plans to do a Ph.D. in his retirement.

His first assignment in 1958 was as an assistant forester in Kilworth Forest, Co. Cork. The following year he was appointed as house master at Shelton Abbey. In 1960 he was promoted to forester in charge, Grade 2, at Buncrana Forest, Co. Donegal. At that time foresters in charge were receiving cash for timber and lettings, and paying out cash as wages they had to sign a declaration as follows: "I am of sober habits, I am not addicted to betting and I am not financially embarrassed". In 1969 he transferred as a forester Grade 2 to Tinahely Forest and Nursery, Co. Wicklow. Since he had replaced a forester Grade 1, he requested that he be promoted to that same grade. Later that year, he was promoted to a forester Grade 1 - once again proving the point that if you don't ask you won't receive.

In 1983 he was promoted to the grade of senior forester with responsibility for Glenealy Forest and Nursery. On taking up this appointment he moved to live in Wicklow Town where he resided for the remainder of his life. It was inevitable that when Coillte was established in 1989, he would find a new niche and he was assigned the task of documenting and assessing Coillte's entire hardwood resource. He did an excellent job and was awarded a M.Agr.Sc. (*For*) for his research. His thesis was titled "Review of the Silviculture and Management of the Principal Broadleaved Tree Species Growing in Ireland". In May 1998 he retired having reached the age of 65.

Jim possessed a very innovative and enquiring mind and was motivated by the pursuit and understanding of concepts as much as in their implementation. He had an



in-depth knowledge of the nursery business having worked in that field continuously for over twenty years.

During his years in Tinahely and Glenealy Jim trained a large number of students and young foresters. He was a strong believer in the benefits of life long education and always encouraged and facilitated those who were keen on further education. Always of a positive disposition, he encouraged young people by continually emphasising that forestry was a wonderful and rewarding career. He did his utmost to ensure that young students and foresters assigned to him had good accommodation and transport to work while they were with him - an attribute that was not as widespread as one might expect. In this regard he encouraged Richard Jack, while a young forester in the early 1980s, to undertake a history of the impact of forestry on Glenealy, an area steeped in the forestry tradition. Richard's project demonstrated how forestry was so hugely inter-connected with life in the community. It highlighted how much history and culture was incorporated in the forest estate. Consideration and preservation of local heritage during forest operations is essential in generating goodwill and healthy neighbourly relationships. This outlook was rare at that time but is now accepted as a vital component of forest planning.

Jim took a keen interest in the Society of Irish Foresters and facilitated many field days. He regularly attended field days himself and was a frequent participant on the Society's annual study tours. These he greatly enjoyed, always questioning and rationalising the reasons for carrying out a particular forestry operation. His most recent study tour was to Croatia in 2009.

In his youth Jim was a keen sportsman and he played inter-county hurling for his native Roscommon. He enjoyed retirement and was deeply involved with Wicklow Lions Club, the Toastmasters and Blainroe Golf Club.

Jim was predeceased by his wife Pauline at a very early age and deserves great credit for rearing three young children on his own. Their success in life is a testament to his dedication to them over the years.

To his son Paul, daughters Maria and Ciara, we offer our sincere sympathy.

Suaimhneas síoraí dá anam.

John Mc Loughlin