

## Gerry de Brit 1936 – 2019

Gerry de Brit passed away peacefully, after a short illness, on the 1<sup>st</sup> February 2019 at St, Vincent's Hospital, Dublin in his 83<sup>rd</sup> year after a long and distinguished career in Forestry.

He was born on the 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1936 to Thomas and Annie (néé Murphy), at Blackrock, Co. Dublin, the second youngest of four siblings, two boys and two girls. He attended Willow Park School and Blackrock College.

A city man, he made the somewhat surprising choice of studying Forestry at UCD and he graduated in 1962. Like many of us, Gerry was introduced to the elements of his future profession through the practical year, which was then an important component of the curriculum, in Glendalough, Co. Wicklow and at the forest nursery in Ballybofey, Co. Donegal. Following a period of study in Scandinavia, Gerry began his career in the nascent Research Branch of the then Forestry Division of the Department of Lands in 1963. Here he served on the team of the distinguished forester and later Chief Inspector Niall OCarroll. As a researcher he specialised in forest protection and the study of pests and diseases which posed a threat to the recently planted forests. He contributed to the early research reports and produced several review papers which were published in *Irish Forestry*. He was promoted to Section leader in 1969.

During the 1970s he was responsible for the forest legislation portfolio in the negotiations on forest health, as Ireland prepared to become a member of the European Economic Community. This necessitated frequent meetings in Brussels and much debate and discussion. Gerry relished this aspect of his work. In common with many in Research Section at that time, it was an opportunity for him to expand his knowledge of forestry as experienced through the close co-operation with the British Forestry Commission and other European Research organisations.

In 1978 he transferred to the Nurseries Section of the Forest Service, under Joe Deasy, where he was tasked with supplying planting stock to support the major state afforestation programmes of that period. His work involved production, management and supply issues from the main nurseries in Counties Carlow, Cork, Donegal, Longford, Mayo, Tipperary, Wexford and Wicklow. At a time of major restructuring of the nursery system, he was promoted to Grade I inspector in 1986 and initiated the development of the new nursery at Ballintemple, Co. Carlow. He maintained this position when Coillte was established in 1989 and he moved to Ballintemple as a



senior manager in 1992, responding to the expanded planting programme of Coillte's early days. Here he oversaw new developments in nursery practice such as cold storage of plants and producing improved species strains. He fostered the development of a cooperative atmosphere with the nursery staff and established good relations with the private nursery sector when both operations joined Irish Forest Industries Chain in the 1990s. He visited the major nurseries in the UK, France, Denmark and the Netherlands. Gerry retired from Coillte in 1998, but continued to live in his attractive riverside home near Bunclody, Co. Wexford.

Gerry had a wide range of cultural and sporting interests and was a dedicated music lover and reader. His musical interests extended from the modern jazz performers of the post war period such as Dave Brubeck to the classical composers. He played the drums and on one occasion caused a stir at a dance in Moneystown when he performed during the interval. His sporting interests and achievements were equally singular at the time, excelling in hockey on the Irish Universities team and cricket for Railway Union in Sandymount. He became a minor cricket celebrity while in Ballybofey, Co. Donegal and was in constant demand for local matches.

We mourn the passing and celebrate the life of a respected and genial colleague. To his wife, Colette, children Geraldine, Aisling, Brian and Rachel, his sisters Mary and Clare and his nine grandchildren, we offer our sincere sympathy.

Gerhardt Gallagher