

Kevin J. Hutchinson 1949 – 2019

Kevin J. Hutchinson, former President and PRO of the Society of Irish Foresters, passed away peacefully after a long illness, on 1st June 2019 at his home in Abbeyleix, Co. Laois.

Kevin, the older of their two boys, was born to Henry and Mary Hutchinson (née Keenan) in Kilkenny on 14th October 1949. He lived in Killamuck near Abbeyleix, Co. Laois where he attended Abbeyleix National School and later received his secondary education at Portlaoise CBS.



On completion of his secondary education, Kevin worked as a computer programmer in Dublin for two years, initially with Irish Life and then with P.J. Carroll & Company. But the call of forestry and the outdoors remained strong and, despite the attractions of a promising career “in computers”, he still yearned for the outdoor life and a return to working amongst his beloved trees. Kevin often recounted how, on long summer days, he would gaze wistfully from the office window at the distant forests as they beckoned him from the foothills of the Dublin Mountains.

The lure of a career in forestry, his first love, eventually won out and he began his studies at UCD in October, 1970. Always a diligent and intelligent student, Kevin graduated with a first-class honours degree in forestry in 1975. While still at college, during the course of his practical year, he spent several months working in the forests of Bavaria. On graduating from UCD, Kevin was awarded a scholarship to study forestry at Yale. However, he declined this offer and opted instead to avail of a Norwegian Government scholarship to study for a year in Norway. On his return from Norway, he was appointed Assistant District Inspector in Sligo. In the midst of this hectic work schedule, Kevin found time to marry Catherine Whelan, his childhood sweet-heart, in March 1978. Their two children, Emma and Henry, were born while the family lived in Sligo.

In 1979 Kevin was appointed the first Executive Director of the Irish Timber Growers Association and here he performed a remarkably successful job in bringing together the many diverse groups that comprised the timber growers’ family. Three years later, with a view to widening his experience, Kevin returned to work with the Forest and Wildlife Service where he was based in Sligo in the Work Study Section. In 1985 he was promoted as District Inspector in the Portlaoise District. This move carried the added attraction that he could return to live in Abbeyleix again.

When Coillte was established, 30 years ago this year, Kevin really flourished as he was afforded much greater opportunities for personal initiative, an attribute he possessed in abundance. In 1998 he was promoted to a Level I manager role in charge of “New Business” and, in an era of slogans, Kevin was quickly out of the traps with: “New Business is Everyone’s Business”. In 2008, he successfully completed the ABC Professional Diploma in Arboriculture in order to have another string to his bow when he retired.

Kevin dedicated much of his time to volunteering with several forestry organisations, none more so than the Society of Irish Foresters where he served in many roles including a two-year term as its president. He played a lead role in the publication of *Forest Images - Fr Browne’s Woodland Photographs* which was published in 1992 to mark the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Society of Irish Foresters. This book was a lavish compendium of old forest photographs taken on the nearby Emo Estate, Co. Laois during in the 1930s.

Kevin’s private collection of books was truly vast – especially its “Trees & Forestry” section. He served on the editorial committee of the project team which oversaw the publication of the facsimile edition of the *Trees of Great Britain and Ireland*. In addition, he regularly compiled a list of the latest books on forestry related topics for the Editor of the Society’s journal, *Irish Forestry*. Even during his illness, Kevin continued to compile this list. Around this time, he discovered the convenience of online book buying and this new pastime continued to occupy and comfort him throughout his illness. Kevin also served as the PRO of the Society of Irish Foresters – a role in which he excelled.

Kevin also served as president of the Tree Council of Ireland. In fact, he was one of only three people who shared the distinction of being president of both the Society of Irish Foresters and the Tree Council of Ireland. As its president, Kevin had no end of ideas and schemes to advance the Tree Council of Ireland, however ill health prevented him from completing his term of office there.

Needless to say, Kevin was the official photographer for both these organisations. In this role, he would line people up and move them about until he was fully satisfied that the perfect composition had been captured for posterity. The highlight of his photographic career was undoubtedly having several of his images feature prominently in Aubrey Fennell’s *Heritage Trees of Ireland* alongside the work of photographer Carsten Krieger.

Kevin was a keen sportsman. In his youth he played minor hurling for Laois but since his grandchildren are from Cork he tended to support that county in later years – just to please them! He was interested in all sports and was actively involved in several clubs in Abbeyleix, particularly the local Tennis Club and the Lions Club.

He was an exceptionally bright and intelligent person but these qualities sat easily on his shoulders. Ever the showman, he was witty and entertaining company –

especially when he had a receptive audience. A meeting with him was always a tonic. His positive attitude and enthusiasm for life were infectious and it always left you feeling better afterwards.

To his wife Catherine, daughter Emma, son Henry, brother Christy, son-in-law Darragh, granddaughters Sadhbh and Siún, nephews Darran and Aubrey and niece Yvette, we offer our sincere sympathy.

Ní bheidh a leithéid ann arís

Pat O'Sullivan