

Obituaries

Seán Campbell 1925 – 2020

Seán Campbell passed away peacefully on 11th January 2020, in his ninety fourth year, in the excellent care of the nuns and staff at the Holy Family Residence, Roebuck, Co. Dublin.

A native of Swinford, Co. Mayo, Seán was born on 16th June 1925, the fourth of six children – four boys and two girls – to Thomas and Brid (née Kenny). The family moved to Wicklow town in 1933 where his father was appointed State Solicitor. Seán received his primary education at the local national school and his secondary education in Mount Melleray College, Co. Waterford.



In 1943 he entered University College Dublin to study forestry and after graduation he took up the position of Land Project Officer in Johnstown Castle, Co. Wexford in 1947, where he worked on the European Recovery Programme (ERP). Known as the Marshall Plan (after George Marshall, US Secretary of State), this post war US initiative part funded many European (including Irish) projects. Some of this funding made its way to the Irish forestry programme which Seán helped to administer.

He entered the then Forestry Division in 1950 and for four years he served as assistant forester in Rathnew forest and forester-in-charge in Killakee, Aughrim and Glenamoy forests.

However, he left the safe haven of a government job in 1954 to establish Irish Forest Products (IFP), one of the first private forestry companies in Ireland. IFP's interests included forest establishment and management, timber processing, seedling and plant production from its Kilpoole Nursery and ancillary businesses such as Christmas tree growing.

In 1979, IFP merged with the Smurfit organisation which owned three sawmills at Aughrim (Woodfab), Fermoy and Mountrath. Seán played a key role in the forestry division of this new enterprise which was known as Smurfit Natural Resources in Ireland along with brief periods in Venezuela and Colombia. When Smurfit withdrew from Irish sawmilling in 1998, he played a vital part in the resurgence of Woodfab in his role as forester and company director until his retirement.

Seán's wide experience of State and private forestry provided him with a unique

insight into our forest resource. He believed passionately in Irish forestry and wasn't afraid to express his views publicly or privately on the importance of the forestry and forest products sector. For example in 1996, he defended forestry in a letter to the *Irish Times* as "a very important element in maintaining household income levels and the fabric of the local community". Here he was citing his experience of the importance of forestry and the forest products sector in Co. Wicklow. He wrote: "As forestry director with Woodfab from the late 1970s to early 1990s, I noted that the relatives and neighbours of our tree planters of the 1950s were now the worker personnel in the mill. Forty years on, forestry was still the largest employer in the area."

He made no apologies for forestry in its place and in Ireland it had a very important place for Seán despite loss and overexploitation. However, it excelled in Wicklow as a major land use. In the same letter to the *Irish Times*, he wrote "In an intensively afforested district, the continuance of the forestry chain from afforestation through to processing within the area, such as is the case within the Aughrim district, will avoid depopulation and decline - socially undesirable features often wrongly associated with afforestation."

After retirement from Woodfab, Seán retained his interest in forestry matters. He served on the steering committee that produced the *Timber Measurement Manual: Standard Procedures for the Measurement of Round Timber for Sale Purposes in Ireland*. From 2000 to 2012 he acted as a private forestry consultant in a number of projects, but mainly as advisor in "The O'Rahilly Plantations" in Counties Roscommon and Leitrim.

Forestry was his life, coming second only to his devotion to his wife Peggie and family. His interests outside family were many, including greyhound racing and Gaelic Football. He was a fine footballer and played senior club football with Annacurra and Rathnew in Co. Wicklow. An avid Mayo supporter, he had the good fortune to watch his beloved green and red during their halcyon days, especially in 1950 and 1951 when they won back-to-back All-Ireland Football Finals.

On April 2012 the Society of Irish Foresters conferred honorary membership on Seán in recognition of his distinguished service to the advancement of forestry and the objectives of the Society of Irish Foresters throughout his long career. He continued to work in several forestry projects until his health began to fail him in 2015. No longer able to visit the forests, many of which he had helped to create, was a disappointment to him but he retained his good humour and interest throughout his illness.

His passing leaves a huge void in Irish forestry and especially among his family and circle of friends. To his wife Peggie, daughters Aifric and Niamh, and son Ross we offer our sincere sympathy.

Go ndéanfaid Dia trócaire ar a anam.

Mark Hogan