

## Pat (PJ) O'Malley 1933 – 2020

Pat O'Malley, a gentleman of forestry who left his kind, indelible mark on the many foresters who knew him, passed away peacefully on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2020 after a short illness.

Pat was born in Louisburgh, Co. Mayo on 17<sup>th</sup> August 1933 to Kathleen and Johnny Jim O'Malley. He was the second eldest of eight children. His family were relatively comfortable farmers for the time and Pat and his siblings were raised with a strong work ethic and willingness to help others.



Despite his parents' concern, Pat decided to end his formal education at 14 years of age and went to work with his Uncle Jim in a pub (The Meetings) near Avoca in Co. Wicklow. Jim was a gentleman and an important role model for the young Pat who worked 12 hours a day, six days a week for a starting wage of 10 shillings per week plus his keep. In time his uncle progressed to a partnership in a Dublin pub and Pat decided that the pub business was not for him.

He had become interested in forestry while in Avoca so, at the age of 17, he became a forest worker in Glendalough Forest. Ambitious to learn more about forestry and to improve his prospects, he set about securing a place at Avondale Forestry Training College. For the next two years he worked by day as a forest worker and studied by night. When he was 19 he sat the entrance examination for the Forestry Training College where he was in competition with thousands of well-educated young people eager for a coveted career in forestry. Despite having a bad flu whilst taking the examinations, he excelled and was one of only 19 students selected that year. He began his three-year training course in 1953 and spent his "practical year" in Tallow, Co. Waterford where the forester, Peadar Healy, helped and encouraged him. Pat returned to Avondale for his final year and graduated with distinction in 1956.

On qualification he was assigned to Collooney Forest, Co. Sligo as an assistant forester and from there he moved to Woodford Forest, Co. Galway. Shortly afterwards he was transferred as Housemaster to Shelton Abbey Forestry College in Co. Wicklow. Two years later he was promoted to the post of Forester-in-charge at Lough Talt Forest near Tubbercurry, Co. Sligo. From there he was transferred to Granard, Co. Longford to manage the large forest nursery. Here he focussed on research and development of improved nursery practices. In September 1970, Pat was promoted to the post of lecturer (Inspector Grade III) at Shelton Abbey Forestry College where he trained

the young foresters of the future. Here he made a hugely positive impression on his students. They remembered his patient and dedicated approach to imparting knowledge – “*whatever I know about forestry I can thank him for it*”, it was “*always done with a smile*”, he would “*stay back with you in the evenings, weekends or anytime to help, he was dedicated to the profession*”, “*he treated us like family*”. After many years at Shelton Abbey, Pat headed back west and spent the rest of his forestry career in Sligo working in forest establishment and management operations. Further promotion soon followed and in 1976 he was appointed District Inspector (Grade II) in Sligo.

Here he enthusiastically promoted afforestation as a viable alternative for farmers on marginal land. He organised promotional field days with Ray Gallagher of ICOS for agricultural advisors from counties Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim to demonstrate the benefits of farm forestry in their educational and EU farm modernisation programmes. This was unheard of at the time but his knowledge of forestry and enthusiasm for farm forestry ensured that the agricultural advisors who were sceptical at the start of the day were leaning towards farm forestry by evening time.

Pat designed two pieces of equipment which would help to make the work of foresters safer, easier and more efficient. One was a highly mobile, hydraulically operated crane for harvesting operations and the other was a handheld tool which accurately measured tree heights for inventory foresters. His ingenuity was rewarded when he won awards from the Department of Forestry for both these inventions. Pat is widely credited with pioneering the change from ploughing to mounding as forest establishment moved from the peatlands onto more marginal agricultural soils. He was an early advocate of mounding – citing the improved tree stability of the 360° rooting system on mounds compared with the line rooting associated with plough ribbons and the reduced need for early stage vegetation control. Pat was a diligent and conscientious colleague and worker, he was honest and most of all, he cared greatly about what he did. A teacher to the very end, his advice to forest workers when pruning was “*if you can hang your coat on it there’s too much left*”.

Pat left the Forest Service in the late 1980s to work as a forestry consultant specialising in forest establishment in counties Mayo and Sligo. He joined Western Forestry Co-op in 1990 and remained there until he retired in 2012, at the age of 79 – a career which spanned 62 years.. For those of us who had the pleasure of working with him he always made time for you no matter how busy he was, we were continually inspired by his encyclopaedic knowledge and passion for trees, silviculture, soils, mixtures and his natural aptitude for forest engineering. We have a saying at Western Forestry Co-op – when you go into certain forests, you know immediately that it is a “*Pat O’Malley forest*”. He was an excellent silviculturalist and this was evident in his attention to detail and his meticulous species selection based on soil and site conditions.

Pat married Christina O'Reilly in 1966 and they had two sons, Shane and Philip, and enjoyed many happy years together. He sons have recounted what a kind Dad he was and how much he taught them by his example. He rarely gave advice and when he did, it was always offered in a way that would not offend, even when he was annoyed. Fun was a big part of Pat's personality and like all his family he was a gifted storyteller – a craft he learned well from his father, Johnny Jim.

Football was an important part of Pat's life. In his youth he played for Louisburgh Senior Club and later played county football for Sligo and Wicklow. Golf was his other sporting passion, a game he taught to his two sons. He was a keen competitor and remained an active golfer until he was 83.

Pat was known far and wide as the "*Gentleman of Forestry*". He did not have favourites but was kind to everyone; he was a gentle, kind and honest colleague. For those of us who knew him and were fortunate enough to have worked with him, we are all so much the better for it. He is sorely missed by his family, his friends and the forestry community he loved so dearly. His family can reflect with pride on the huge contribution Pat made to forestry and the forestry community and his positive influence on the people he came in contact with.

To his wife Christina and his sons Shane and Philip, brother Séan, sister Maura, grandchildren Ella, Rebekah, Charlie, Eddie and Alex, daughters-in-law Georgina and Svetlana, we extend our deepest sympathy.

*May his kind and gentle soul rest in peace.*

Marina Conway