

George T. Hipwell 1941 – 2020

After a life of giving selflessly of his time, wisdom and kindness to others, George Hipwell passed away suddenly on 16th July 2020 at his home in Rathangan, Co. Kildare. He was in his 79th year.

George, the eldest of seven children, was born to George and Sarah (née Carroll) on the 9th June 1941 at Fortel, Birr, Co. Offaly. The family moved to Rathangan, Co. Kildare when George was still a child. He received his primary education at Rathangan national school and his secondary education at the Diocesan College in Knockbeg, Co. Carlow.



He began his forestry studies in 1959, initially at Kinnitty Forestry College and completed his course at Shelton Abbey, Co. Wicklow in 1962.

His first assignment was to Silvermines Forest, Newport, Co. Tipperary. He also worked in Gort, Co. Galway. This was followed by a transfer to Delgany Forest, Newtownmountkennedy, Co. Wicklow in the mid-1960s and in 1970 to Ardagh in Co. Donegal. George was posted to Ballybrittas Forest in early 1971 where he set up home in Emo, Co. Laois before eventually moving back to Rathangan, Co. Kildare. Some years later Ballybrittas Forest, Monasterevin Forest and Donadea were amalgamated. George retired as forest manager of this large forest in 2006 but, such was his love of forestry that he continued to work as a forestry consultant up to the time of his passing.

In his younger days George was an accomplished hurler and played in Kinnitty College and Shelton Abbey. He played for Shelton Abbey in the Wicklow County Championship. He also had a passion for horse racing and was a steward at the Curragh racecourse.

Forestry and trees were always an integral part of his life and when Coillte was established in 1989 George came into his own. Without doubt, he was the best-known forester in Co. Kildare through the Christmas Tree retail depot he set up at Ballybrittas each year. However, he will always be associated with Donadea Forest Park for which he had a great fondness. He played a key role in the development of the park that we have today. In addition, George looked after the Coillte stand at the Tullamore Show every year.

A lifelong member of the Society of Irish Foresters, George was a keen and active participant in its many activities. He was a regular participant in the Society's Annual Study Tour, including last year's tour to Bosnia-Herzegovina, and whenever there were forest walks to be led he was first to volunteer.

A human dynamo, George was forever on the go. He was immersed in the activities of his local community. You could meet him on his way to a Credit Union meeting, a forestry meeting, bingo, Civil Defence, GAA, a Tidy Towns meeting - and that might just be on a Monday evening! He had an incredible reserve of energy and strength and a great sense of purpose. He was full of enthusiasm, passion and commitment for everything he was involved with. Sometimes maybe too passionate; on occasion, I believe there may have been the odd outburst of energy or a flurry of expletives. But it was invariably well-intentioned and his heart was always in the right place. Such was his involvement in his community that he was nominated for Kildare man of the year in 2003.

Following his retirement George completed a course in genealogy at UCD after which he spent years researching his own family tree and he was very proud of his roots and where he came from. He was particularly generous in helping others to research their family trees.

In her eulogy at his funeral Mass, his wife Mary summed him up very well when she said “He was sensitive, insightful, creative, quirky, generous, impatient, but above all very, very lovable”.

To his wife Mary, sons and daughters, Paul, Eoin, Áine and Olive, his brothers and sisters, Denis, Carol, JJ, Desmond, Liam and Pearl and his grandchildren, we offer our sincere sympathy.

Arthur Buckley