

Brian Hussey

1935 – 2021

On 2nd February 2021 Brian Hussey passed away in Park Village, Limerick, just six weeks after his twin brother Derry.

He was born on 15th September 1935 to Dudley Hussey, an engineer with the ESB, and Doreen (née McSherry). He grew up in Terenure and attended St. Mary's College, Rathmines before graduating from UCD with a Degree in Mechanical and Electrical Engineering.

At secondary school and college he was a keen chess player and also participated in amateur drama. However, he excelled at rugby and won a first Leinster Senior Cup for St. Mary's College Rugby Club in 1958, with his brother Derry – they were on opposite wings.

After working in engineering for a few years he was drawn back to the land. He and his wife farmed in Donard, Co. Wicklow, where his son John now owns the mixed enterprise farm, including forestry, and in the Burren, Co. Clare. With his wife, he restored Blessington Court House as a craft shop and office. He was active in the West Wicklow Development Association. Brian was always interested in applying science to projects such as grassland management – indeed Brian was president of the Irish Grassland Association in 1976-1977.

Although he was actively involved in forestry for no more than twenty-five years, he had a remarkable influence on private forestry in Ireland. His interest in forestry as a commercial enterprise was stirred while working with his friend Justin Keating, on the TV programme, *Telefis Feirme* about the marginal disadvantaged soils of the North West. Brian went on an Irish Grassland Study Tour to New Zealand in 1972 and was fascinated by the story of *Radiata* pine. Inspired also by the pioneering efforts of Aodhogan O'Rahilly around Drumhierney, Co. Leitrim and Robert Tottenham in Clare, he set up Tree Farmers Limited with Hal Sisk in Blessington in 1978. That morphed into the Woodland Investments business and relocated to Galway in 1986. It was tough going initially but, once he had decided on a course of action, compromise was not a word in Brian's lexicon. He spearheaded a legal challenge to the activities of the Land Commission, and although losing in the High Court he appealed to the Supreme Court which determined in 1985 that the Commission had abused its legal powers in obstructing the acquisition of land for forestry. The Commission was subsequently dissolved. Brian firmly believed that the public sector, as well as the private sector, had to act within a legal context and he had many other successful battles with bureaucracy.



Brian believed passionately in the potential of forestry on marginal agricultural land and for generating rural wealth. Gradually business success came with pension and institutional funding for forestry investment. Brian gave a lot back to the sector. He was a member of the 1984 Review Group on Forestry arising from the National Plan “Building on Reality”. The Report of the Review group had a significant impact on State policy, leading indirectly, to the establishment of Coillte in 1989.

Brian was a past Chairman and a long serving member of the Executive Committee of the Irish Timber Growers Association. Brian spoke fluent French and representing the ITGA in Brussels for many years. He chaired the organising Committee for *the right trees in the right places* - the seminal 1990 Conference on Forestry and the Environment organised by ITGA, An Taisce and the RDS. His summary of proceedings could still serve as a useful blueprint – poor agricultural prospects on many soils, unique forestry opportunity, need for a land use policy; forests produce wood; they affect the environment; need to reconcile interests; the importance of forest design and better training for decision makers and others – all with a view to wood production with improved quality and increased consciousness of the multi-purpose potential of forests.

His contribution to the evolution of private forestry was immense and his belief that first and foremost, forestry had to be a commercial enterprise was unwavering. He was, in the words of a former Chief Inspector, a “champion of forestry”.

Brian and Anna moved from Galway to the Burren over twenty years ago. He had retained a small holding there on which there was woodland and the ruins of a Norman Tower house. He restored it with skilled local tradesmen, designing the magnificent Douglas fir roof supports supplied by Coillte’s sawmill in Dundrum, Co. Tipperary. Supported by Anna, he created an arboretum and wildlife haven which was maintained carefully with his neighbour, the artist Richard Sharp. Brian and Anna kept a hospitable table where they entertained generously, and he quietly displayed his love of cooking and fine wines. Brian had a keen interest in Irish history, art, literature and sailing (owning a Galway hooker at one time) and had an impressive collection of books on a wide variety of topics.

Brian was a gamechanger who influenced policy and effectively created not just a business but a sector. In the words of the French writer Jean Giono in his short story *The Man who Planted Trees*, he has left visible traces in the world – in Irish forestry and at Gregan’s Castle in Co. Clare where his remains will rest in a grove of *Taxus baccata* ‘fastigiata’ established with his usual careful preparation.

We offer our sincere condolences to Brian’s wife Anna, his children, his brother and sister and to the Hussey family.

John Phelan