

Michael (Mick) O'Donovan

1925 – 2021

Michael O'Donovan died peacefully at home on 13th October 2021 surrounded by his family. He was in his 96th year and had played a key role in the development of Irish forestry in a career which spanned forty-six years.

Michael, or Mick as he was known, was born in Castleventry, Rossmore, Clonakilty Co. Cork on 4th December 1925, to Michael (Sonny) O'Donovan and Nellie (née O' Brien). He was the eldest of three siblings, a brother John and sister Peggy. He attended the local national school and later received his secondary education in St Mary's School, Clonakilty – a daily cycle of fourteen miles for the young scholar.



Michael entered Avondale Forestry College in 1944, travelling from Clonakilty to Cork and from Cork up to Dublin and then down to Rathdrum Co. Wicklow by train before walking the final leg of his journey from Rathdrum Station to Avondale. The forestry trainees of his period were pioneers of the industry and were setting out on an uncertain career path during the Second World War.

On completing his forestry training at Avondale his first appointment was to Portlaw, Co. Waterford where he met his future wife, Nora Cusack. He transferred to Monivea, Co. Galway in 1950. He was appointed forester in Avondale in 1952. Remembering his own long trek from Clonakilty to Avondale, he always tried to collect new forestry students at the train station in Rathdrum when they arrived for the first time.

Michael was appointed Forester in Charge in Kilsheelan, Co. Tipperary in 1957. His next move was on promotion as Assistant District Inspector in Donegal in 1959. He remained there until 1970 when he was promoted to the post of District Inspector in Limerick. Nine years later, he was again promoted when he was appointed Divisional Inspector in Cork where he remained until his retirement in 1990. When Coillte was established in 1989, Mick was an enthusiastic supporter of the autonomy and accountability that the new organisation conferred on foresters, who could now manage their work untrammelled by the 'dual structure' he had experienced for the previous 44 years.

Mick always had deep respect for his fellow foresters and forest staff. In an article he penned for the *Social History of Forestry in Ireland* stating that "From the outset forestry attracted people of the highest calibre who were widely renowned for their enthusiasm, dedication and self-sacrifice. What has been achieved is truly remarkable given the constraints under which they operated. They endured the worst possible working conditions, inhospitable sites, difficult terrain and exposure to all weathers."

He worked tirelessly to improve the conditions of his fellow foresters through the Society of Irish Foresters. While in Avondale, he ensured that all students were signed up members of the Society before they were dispersed around the country. In recognition of his services to forestry Mick was made an Honorary Member of the Society in 2013.

Mick was extremely interested in all sports from GAA to soccer, golf, rugby but especially Cork hurling and football. He attended his first All-Ireland Final in 1951. A keen gardener all his life, he produced year-round vegetables and colour from his garden.

He was a highly regarded and respected forester. He had a profound knowledge of both scientific and practical forestry and possessed a fantastic memory and was a great conversationalist with his recall of events down to the smallest detail.

To his wife Nora and his family Helen, Noreen, Ann, and Noel we extend our sincerest sympathies.

Tim Crowley