

OBITUARY

James J. Maher (1916-1982)



It is with great sadness that we have to record the passing of Jim Maher only eight months after his retirement from the Forest and Wildlife Service. He took his forestry degree in U.C.D. in 1942 and spent the following seven years in direct charge of field operations in a wide variety of forest conditions. This combination of science and practical experience was to be the foundation of an outstanding career which contributed uniquely to the expansion and success of Irish forestry.

From 1949 to 1954, in his first assignment as inspector, he had acquisition responsibility for "opening up the west" from Sligo to the Shannon, setting the pattern for the now thriving western forest estate. The following decade he spent in district management in the south where he will be especially remembered for the rehabilitation of Ballyhoura Forest. There followed nine years in charge of the Bray Division, seven years as Senior Inspector (Management South) and finally two years as Assistant Chief Inspector (Management).

With his scientific and practical background, Jim never accepted the experts' text without stringent testing in the crucible of his own experience. But he welcomed and applied the tested results of research and he fostered close and direct communication between researchers and field staff. He will be remembered as a pioneer in three aspects of forestry. The first was the new approach to site assessment in the light of emerging mechanical and chemical techniques, followed up by their practical application to establishment. The second was his unfettered approach to stand management and especially the introduction of line thinning. The third was his enthusiastic tackling of harvesting problems and planning to co-ordinate output with industrial expansion, reconciling inventory forecasts with local management requirements.

To end on this note would be to omit Jim's greatest contribution. He was one of the great "characters" in Irish forestry. His passion for trees was exceeded only by his interest in his fellow man and his great generosity of spirit. He looked on himself not as the Government Inspector but as the friend and collaborator of all who worked in his chargeship. His knowledge of their foibles and their strengths, their family circumstances and their connections, was legendary. No one will ever know how often he used this comprehension to save people from "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune". His dedication to his profession and his regard for his fellow man provided an inspiring example to us all. That is his great legacy to Irish forestry.

To his wife, Kathleen and his children, the Society extends its deep sympathy.

T. McEvoy