

## Obituary

### JOHN McSORLEY 1910-1988

John was laid to rest in the heart of his beloved Clogher Valley on a beautiful April morning within sight of his life's work in the forests of Co. Tyrone.

He was one of that great company of foresters recruited in the hard times of the twenties and marked by dedication and commitment.

Only four of them achieved the record of 50 years unbroken service and John was the first.

Born at Motherwell in Scotland on 18 May 1910 the family moved to Baronscourt in 1913.

John left school at the age of 14 and started work that October in the forest, where three of his brothers also worked, under David Stewart. Like all that generation of foresters John had a fund of stories about that spartan regime and of cost effectiveness without the aid of work study and all for 14/- per 60½ hour week.

In September 1929 the first two local lads were selected for forester training at Denmore; they were John McSorley and John Montgomery and both were awarded their Foresters Certificates in 1931.

John found himself as a Leading Labourer at Drumrammer with his brother Joe nearby at Cam and both under Murdo Macpherson in North Derry.

However, Harry Mitchell, John's third Scots boss needed a foreman at Rostrevor and soon John was helping to plant the scree slopes of Slievemartin. Soil was so scarce that to achieve full stocking it was carried in buckets from where it could be found.

Planting was going on at Fathom Wood in Co. Armagh and the men had to cycle that 14 miles and be there at starting time.

John achieved every forester's ambition and within a year was given a forest of his own as a Foreman in Charge of Knockmany where he spent 27 happy years. Here he married Molly Corrigan and they reared their family of four girls and two boys.

Those in possession of the 1966 edition of "The Forests of Ireland" should refer to Plate VIII opposite page 21 where John is depicted beside a 119 ft Sitka spruce aged 39 years at Knockmany.

He used to relate that when he arrived at Knockmany he could shoot rabbits over the tops of these P.19 Sitka.

To begin with there were only two men at Knockmany and six at Favour Royal, which had just been acquired. Gradually he became identified with the whole Clogher Valley and East Fermanagh as each new area came in.

In 1959 he moved to Fivemiletown to be centrally placed to help with the management of the whole district working under John Phillips and later Noel Parker until 1970.

At this point the Rural Improvement Campaign started and for his final five years before retirement he organised and managed hundreds of men over four Districts covering Fermanagh, Tyrone and South Derry. This was a job which gave plenty of scope for imagination and he used his eye for landscape and his vision of the forests for the good of the community to the full.

On retirement he went back to live among the trees at Fardross Forest on the south side of the valley where he could tend his garden and the oaks which he had sown in the nursery (now abandoned) and turn it into a public amenity.

In his 70th year he unveiled a plaque and declared open a path through the wood to be called "The John McSorley Oak Wood" which remains as a fitting memorial to a man whose life personified forestry in the service of his fellow men.

To his life's partner and their family we offer our deepest sympathy.

CSK

### **TOMMY REA**

Tommy Rea, Assistant secretary of the Department of Energy, passed away on 18 October 1988 in New York while on official business.

He will be deeply missed by those who knew him in the Forest Service.

An obituary will follow in the Spring Edition of the Journal.

(Ed.)