

Obituary

THOMAS O'CARROLL

1914 - 1990

Tom O'Carroll, or Tomas Ua Cearbhaill as he was officially known from 1945, was buried under a warm September sun in Castlemacadam, a small graveyard near Avoca, Co. Wicklow. He had selected the place himself. It lies beside a wood and looks across the valley to Shelton Forest, Tom's base for many years. During the ceremony we heard chainsaws felling trees he had tended, and perhaps selected for planting. Forest production continues, indifferent to human vicissitudes, and the forest in its regeneration celebrates the forester.

Thomas O'Carroll was born in August 1914 in Arklow where his parents both taught school, and was educated locally and in Wicklow town. His father built a summer house near Avondale and it was there that the forestry connection began. This may have come in the person of Michael O'Beirne, Superintendent of Avondale Forestry School, who had been a contemporary of Tom's uncles in the former Royal College of Science for Ireland, later incorporated into U.C.D. (The College of Science building, incidentally, now houses the Department of the Taoiseach.) This contact led to an interest in forestry as a career, and, following his brother Joe, Tom qualified with a degree in forestry from U.C.D. in 1939.

His first appointment was as Temporary Assistant Junior Forestry Inspector in December 1939, and he was promoted to the rank of Assistant Junior Forestry Inspector (Unestablished) – those were



the official titles – in May 1942. He served on District work in Clonmel, Portlaoise and Limerick before being appointed Superintendent of Avondale forestry School in October 1949. He transferred with the school to Shelton Abbey and later had responsibility for all internal education, including Kinnitty Castle. He retired in August 1979 as Senior Inspector responsible for Forest and Conservation research. He died on September 18th 1990.

During his years in Avondale and Shelton Tom was strongly committed to his teaching. He habitually "gutted" (his own word) forestry periodicals for items that would help him in imparting more and better forestry knowledge to

his students, that being always his first priority.

My own introduction to forestry came from Tom O'Carroll (We were first cousins). During a holiday in the summer house at Ballinaclash (Clash) in the summer of 1950 he brought me around Avondale. I clearly remember his obvious enthusiasm as we toured the plots and specimen trees of the big ride.

Tom was involved in one notable incident in the history of Irish forestry. On 19th November 1954 *The Irish Times* published a letter over the pseudonym *Rubus Strigosus*. In the circumstances of the time the publication of the letter caused quite a stir in some quarters, and was a *cause celebre* generally. It can now be recorded for the first time that the letter was written by Tom O'Carroll and his eldest brother, the late Michael, with help from another forester now enjoying his retirement. It could not be claimed that *Rubus Strigosus* achieved any tangi-

ble result, but it served as a valiant rallying call at a very difficult time for the forestry profession. The words *Rubus Strigosus* may be translated as "bristly raspberry".

Tom O'Carroll was a man of independent mind and had definite opinions on certain topics which he was quite prepared to defend, and to act on if he thought it appropriate. But anyone who knew him will know that he enjoyed forestry and enjoyed life. His friends were known to experience practical jokes and with considerable gusto he would occasionally dispatch by the post wittily annotated newspaper cuttings which were always apposite to some current topic, often not of a public nature. He was an enthusiastic forester and a good friend.

To his widow Lilian and to his sons and daughter we offer the sympathy of his friends and colleagues.

Niall O'Carroll