

Obituaries

H. M. FitzPatrick 1902-1994

Maurice FitzPatrick, who died in April 1994 in his 92nd year, was a man of exceptional and varied talents which he devoted generously to the cause of forestry and trees throughout most of his lifetime.

Born in Clontarf, Dublin, he completed his secondary education at Belvedere College, after which he entered the British Forestry Commission as a trainee forester and carried out his practical training at Dundrum, Co. Tipperary, and Baronscourt, Co. Tyrone, during those times of conflict before the Treaty in 1922. In reminiscence he would sometimes recall the trauma of the occasional threatening visits of the Black and Tans to the training quarters in Dundrum.

He would talk too of his boyhood visits to Co. Meath. "As a Dublin boy," he recalled, "I got to know trees, flowers and growing things which set my feet on a career which brought me from the cramped city into the woods, the fields and hills".

In the mid-twenties Maurice FitzPatrick entered the College of Science under the renowned Professor Henry, and having completed his Working Plan at the Oak Forest of Troncias in France, proceeded to his forestry degree in due course.

As a postgraduate student Professor Henry gave every encouragement to his gifted student, and in 1929 and 1933 two of what are probably his finest works were published by the RDS: "*Coniferae, Key to the Genera and Species* and *Trees of Ireland, Native and Introduced* respectively. The former is still in use and regarded as the best key available for serious systematic teaching of conifer dendrology, while the latter still stands as an essential reference to foresters and arboriculturalists who study trees and their whereabouts

in our country. To complete *Trees of Ireland, Native and Introduced*, he visited 85 estates and arboreta, North and South, mostly on a pushbike, identifying and measuring each tree recorded – a phenomenal achievement of skill and physique.

Maurice FitzPatrick joined the adolescent Forestry Service in the early thirties and served as one of the top inspectors until 1943, when he retired for personal reasons. The loss of his potential at that stage was a blow to foresters and forestry in the difficult times that lay ahead in the Service.

However, his contribution to forestry did not abate. He was a founder member of the Society of Irish Foresters in 1942 and was intimately involved in its formative years. He was President of the Society on five occasions. He was appointed to the onerous task of editing the first *Forests of Ireland*, a quality and comprehensive book published in 1965 and a major achievement in the history of the Society at that time.

At a time when forestry and trees were not much in the news in the late 40s, he was a founding member of Trees for Ireland and was central to its activity. On its behalf he lectured throughout the country and was author of a number of books and booklets – *Ireland's Countryside* 1963, *The Story of our Trees* 1984, *Planting for Profit* 1960-74 (three editions), *Forestry, Fuinseog* and some other leaflets.

Also, with Mrs Henry, the widow of Professor Henry, he initiated the Roadside Tree Association and they were instrumental in having the first roadside trees planted on the Stillorgan and Adelaide Roads. He wrote *Roadside Trees in Town and Country* and *Ornamental Prunus* on behalf of that association.

In 1983 he presented the classic

Trees of Great Britain and Ireland, 7 Volumes, by Elwes & Henry to the RDS: this had been a special personal gift copy from Professor Henry to Maurice.

As late as 1985 he was the author of *Trees and the Law* published by the Incorporated Law Society of Ireland.

Apart from his direct contribution to forestry and trees, his interest in the countryside in all its aspects was widespread. He was a founding member of Macra na Feirme, was directly instrumental in devising the most appropriate title for that organisation, and was active in its Co. Wicklow branch.

His knowledge of trees, not just forest trees, was universal and profound. As to the science of forestry, he was unshakeable in his belief in traditional values and that a knowledge of trees in the broad sense and the scientific fundamentals of silviculture were an essential basis for education of foresters, and that the principles of 'Sustained Yield' should be axiomatic to all forest practice.

Maurice FitzPatrick was a kindly and hospitable man and gave great pleasure to many friends, in and outside forestry, in participating at gatherings he arranged from time to time at his beautifully situated home at Nuns Cross near Ashford, Co. Wicklow. He had a prodigious memory for people and names, not only for the adults but also for their numerous children.

It is appropriate to quote from the fine appreciation that appeared in the *Irish Times* shortly after his death: "Despite his age and having suffered the loss of his immediate family, the respect and affection in which he was held by so many former colleagues and others who shared the love of trees caused him to be surrounded by solicitude and attention right up to the time of his death".

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By his wish he was laid to rest in the cemetery at Glenealy under the benign shelter of the surrounding hills and forests, and the Wicklow countryside he knew and loved so well. He can share in full measure the epitaph on the memorial stone to Professor Henry at Avondale – “he enriched our knowledge of trees”

May he rest in well deserved peace.

O.V.M.
