

Dedicated gardener on a grand scale

Thomas Robert Noel Lothian, OBE
Botanic Gardens director
Born: December 25, 1915; Melbourne
Died: September 24, 2004; Townsville

NOEL Lothian made South Australia aware it had a splendid Botanic Garden and spent 32 years making it better. He was the director of the Botanic Garden from 1948 to 1980 and pioneered the garden's advisory service to make its expertise available to both primary producers and suburban gardeners.

His most enduring monument, however, will be the Mt Lofty Botanic Garden, which was conceived by him shortly after his appointment, and lovingly planned and continuously promoted by him.

Mr Lothian was a passionate believer in the role of trees.

As early as 1948 when the prevailing culture was to knock down all scrub to make way for crops and pasture, he pleaded for pastoralists, farmers and authorities to plant as well as clear. In the cities, he fought for street trees to give relief from the sun, purify the air and provide softening beauty.

Born Thomas Robert Noel Lothian, he was always known as Noel because of his Christmas Day birthday. His father had established Lothian Publishing, which probably instilled in him his love of books.

He was educated at Melbourne's Scotch College and Burnley Horticultural College.

He spent some years with the Melbourne City Council, principally at the Fitzroy Gardens, before travelling to London and Munich, working at Kew and the Munich botanic gardens between 1938 and 1940, and completing further studies at Kew.

He was on the last train out of Munich before war was declared in 1939. Returning to Australia, he married Ngaio Chaffey in 1940. During the war, he was in charge of a group of army farms in New Guinea.

In 1944, he became senior lecturer in horticulture at Lincoln College, Christchurch, New Zealand, where he es-



tablished the horticultural diploma and degree courses. He also completed the six-year National Diploma in Horticulture, graduating with the gold medal.

He took up the appointment as the sixth director of the Adelaide Botanic Garden and secretary to the board of governors on January 1, 1948.

The Adelaide Botanic Garden that he took over had considerably deteriorated during the Depression and the following war years. Sharing a similar drive and passion to former gardens champions Francis and Schomburgk, Noel arrived with a plan of goals to be achieved, and clear strategies for achieving them.

Among these were a technical advisory service, improved staff training and professional recognition, re-establishment of the herbarium and library, re-establishment of the international seed-exchange programs, improvements to landscaping and labelling, restoration of Botanic Park, establishment of regional

tree plantations and the possible expansion to a new site, together with an increased profile for the garden.

On his retirement in 1980, it could be unequivocally said that he had comprehensively achieved all of the major goals that he had outlined at the beginning of his term.

Another of Noel's significant achievements was the expansion of the national parks system in SA. He was appointed a member of the National Parks Commission and then became chairman during the late 1960s, a period of unparalleled growth in the number and area of parks.

He was also president of the Royal Australian Institute of Parks and Recreation, of which he was made an honorary life fellow; and editor of the *South Australian Naturalist* for 22 years. He was a council member of Adelaide University.

During his career, he wrote a series of books on gardening and made radio and TV programs for the ABC. He was a regular contributor to horticultural journals in Australia and overseas. Because he was in Queensland, last year was the first time in nearly 50 years that he did not exhibit or judge at the Royal Adelaide Show. He had been a councillor and member of the executive of the Royal Agricultural and Horticultural Society since 1948.

In 1961, he was awarded the OBE for services to horticulture, and in 1975 the Royal Horticultural Society in London awarded him the Veitch Memorial Gold Medal. He is survived by his second wife, Vivian, three children and their families.

□ A memorial service will be held near the lower car park of the Mt Lofty Botanic Garden at 2pm on Friday, October 8. RSVP to the Garden on 8370 8370.

□ Compiled from obituaries written by Stephen Forbes, director Botanic Gardens and State Herbarium, Don Riddell and Andrew Lothian.