Mr Noel Lothian was Director of the Botanic Gardens of Adelaide for nearly 33 years, from 1948 to 1980.

He was born in Mont Albert and educated at Scotch College in Melbourne. From there, he went on to complete the Horticultural Course at Burnley Horticultural College in Melbourne. After this, he spent some years with the Melbourne City Council, principally at the Fitzroy Gardens.

He received further training at the Christchurch Botanic Gardens in New Zealand, and then at the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew in England. He was carrying out further study at the Munich Botanic Gardens when World War II was declared.

During the war years, Mr Lothian was in charge of a group of army farms in New Guinea. Following the war, he returned to New Zealand where he gained the National Diploma of Horticulture (NZ), for which he was awarded the Cockayne Gold Medal. He was appointed Senior Lecturer in Horticulture at the University of New Zealand (Lincoln College), where he established the horticultural diploma and degree courses.

He took up the appointment as the sixth Director of the Adelaide Botanic Garden and Secretary to the Board of Governors on 1st January 1948. The Adelaide 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. Amongst 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 program, 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 Gardens.

On his retirement on the eve of his 65th birthday 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 as Director of the Botanic Gardens and State Herbarium.

Noel died at Townsville, Queensland, on 24 September 2004, and his ashes were scattered at the Mount Lofty Botanic Garden on 8 October 2004.

Stephen Forbes
Director, Adelaide Botanic Gardens and State Herbarium