

Thomas Robert Noel Lothian

25 December 1915 – 24 September 2004



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.

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

Noel was President of the Royal Australian Institute of Parks and Recreation, and was made an Honorary Life Fellow of that organisation. He was Chairman of the South Australian National Park Commission; Royal Society of South Australia and Field Naturalists' Society of South Australia and was Editor of the "South Australian Naturalist" for 22 years. He was a Council member of the University of Adelaide.

He was a regular contributor to horticultural journals in Australia and overseas; and made many broadcasts and television appearances. He had published

three books on general gardening and Australian native plants.

During May to September in 1974 he spent three weeks in China with an Australian Cultural Mission looking at parks, gardens and urban open spaces. He revisited that country in 1977.

In 1961 Mr Lothian was awarded the O.B.E. for his services to horticulture, and in 1975 the Royal Horticultural Society in London awarded him the Veitch Memorial Gold Medal in recognition of his work.

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

We thank the Botanic Gardens of Adelaide for permission to use the image of Noel Lothian.

There is an excellent account of Mr Lothian's contributions to the Adelaide Botanic Gardens under his Directorship in the following publication:

Adelaide Botanic Garden Conservation Study. Prepared for the board of the botanic gardens of Adelaide. Richard Aitken, David Jones, Colleen Morris. 2.0 Development of Adelaide Botanic Garden. 2.2.7 The Lothian directorship (1948–80), page 47–51. Available online at: http://www.environment.sa.gov.au/botanicgardens/pdfs/consabg_2hist3.pdf

Noel Lothian became a member of the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture in 1977 and received the award of Associate of Honour (AHRH) in 1988. Mr Lothian kindly made a bequest to the RNZIH with the request that his gift be used to further the aims and objects of the Institute.