

Thomas, Jack (from *The Forester* June 2003)

Obituary—Jack Thomas

The passing of Jack Thomas on 6 April 2003 at the age of 92 must mark, or very nearly so, the end of an era in Australian forestry.

A graduate in forestry from the original Australian Forestry School in Canberra in 1933, Jack Thomas was already A.U.A (Com), Adelaide.

With service to the old Woods and Forests Department in South Australia, beginning in the early years of the significant utilisation of the State's pine plantation resource in the South-east Region with the establishment of the State Sawmill at Mount Burr in 1931—in the absence of significant interest from the private sector—he saw that Department withstand a Royal Commission and a World War to go on to the large, efficient, and integrated complex which it had become at the time of his retirement in June, 1975, after 42 years of service. Before World War II, he served in district forestry in the South-eastern and Central Regions. At one stage in this period he was heavily involved with E. H. F. Swan's commissioned assessment of the condition, management and industrial potentialities of the *Pinus radiata* plantation of south-eastern South Australia, the report upon which was to lead the Royal Commission on Afforestation in 1935 into the controversial Wood Pulp Agreement Bill (1934) referred to it by Parliament.

With the outbreak of World War II in 1939, Jack Thomas joined the 1st Forestry Company, A.I.F., with which he saw service in the U.K. and New Guinea, and of which he duly became the commanding officer with the rank of Major, in succession to C. R. Cole.

When he resumed Departmental duty after the War, he was appointed Working Plans Officer in 1945 in succession to A. L. Pinches, and in 1950 became Assistant Conservator. Then, in 1969, he became the Department's sixth Conservator and, as such, a member of the Forestry Board. He was also a member of the Standing Committee of the Australian Forestry Council, the National Sirex Fund, and several State committees. He was a long-standing member of the Institute of Foresters of Australia, and was Chairman of the South Australian Division from 1946 to 1955. He was also for many years the Local Honorary Secretary in South Australia for the then Commonwealth Forestry Association. In 1954 he was awarded the Russell Grimwade Prize for studies in forestry in Europe under the auspices of the Department of Forestry of Oxford University, gaining his Diploma of Forestry (Oxon.) with a dissertation concerning the nutrient and litter aspects of what was at that time becoming known as the Second Rotation Problem in South Australia. While engaged in this work he also became interested in genetic tree improvement—at that time well under way in Europe—and, seeing its potential for *radiata* pine in South Australia, he initiated from Oxford the first steps in what became the South Australian seed orchard program and its successors. JT, as he was known to his many forestry associates, had a very real liking for forests of all kinds, and for forestry. He also had a long-standing interest in Australian native plants, particularly ferns, and was a member of the Royal Horticultural Society of Great Britain.

He had a long and fruitful career, one that included the halcyon days of one of South Australia's oldest, most colourful, and economically successful Public Service departments.

His associates extend condolences to Jessie, his wife of 61 years, and to his family.

N. B. Lewis

