Assistant Director retires

Department of Agriculture, Western Australia

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ASSISTANT DIRECTOR RETIRES

Mr. G. H. Burvill (63) retired on September 3 as Assistant Director of Agriculture after 44 years with the Department of Agriculture. He joined the Department as a cadet in 1927.

One of Western Australia's best-known agricultural scientists, Mr. Burvill has had an important influence on many aspects of the State's farming industries over more than 30 years.

He has an unequalled knowledge of the State's soils, climate and agriculture.

Mr. Burvill received his secondary education at Perth Modern School and entered the University of W.A. with the Seeligson Scholarship and a Government Exhibition in 1926. He was awarded a degree in agricultural science with first class honours in 1931.

From 1931 to 1936, as a member of the Department's Plant Nutrition Branch, he was involved in soil surveys covering more than a million acres of potential farming land near Salmon Gums and in the north-eastern wheatbelt.

From 1937 to 1938 he was loaned to the C.S.I.R.O. for soil survey and research work in South Australia and Victoria and during this time was awarded the degree of Master of Agricultural Science at the University of Adelaide, for studies in the physical properties of soils.

In 1938 he returned to Western Australia and until 1947 was a leading member of the Department of Agriculture research team whose work made possible the development of millions of acres of light land in Western Australia. In 1947 he was involved in research on differences in plant responses to pre- and post-war superphosphate, which led to the recognition of widespread zinc deficiency on many sandy and gravelly soils.

His investigations of plants and soils covered all parts of the State and embraced a wide range of crops, including cereals, pastures, tobacco, bananas, hops, apples, vines, potatoes, vegetables, flax and tropical crops.

In 1944, Mr. Burvill carried out the soil survey which was the basis for planning the Ord River Irrigation Project and named the main soil type Cunnunurra clay.

He was appointed Commissioner of Soil Conservation in the Department of Agriculture in 1947, and in 1956 he became Chief of the Plant Research Division, which carries out research on a wide range of plant nutrition, pasture, cereal and horticultural problems.

In 1969, Mr. Burvill was appointed Assistant Director of Agriculture, taking over part of the growing administrative load of the Department. The many rural problems created by the 1969 drought then became his major responsibility, particularly administration of drought relief aid provided by the Government.

Widely respected by professional colleagues, Mr. Burvill was Federal President of the Australian Institute of Agricultural Science in 1969-70. He was State President of the Institute in 1945-46 and was awarded a Fellowship of the Institute in 1961 for his contributions to agricultural science. He was President of the Royal Society of W.A. in 1950-51. He has been an Australian delegate to a number of international scientific congresses.

At various times during his career Mr. Burvill has served on Government committees including Soil Conservation Advisory Committee, Purity of Water Committee, State Mapping Committee, Climatological Consultative Committee, Drought Relief Advisory Committee, Commonwealth Consultative Committee on Drought.

He was Chairman of the Salt Land Advisory Committee and the Avon Valley Zone Development Committee, also of a committee which in 1946 reported on problems in the Lake Grace, Newdegate and Pingrup areas.

In this work he was known for his ability to co-operate with people from a wide variety of professions and organisations.