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Plant pathologist retires

Department of Agriculture, Western Australia

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The Chief of the Department of Agriculture's Biological Services Division, Mr. W. P. Cass Smith, retired from the Department on July 16 this year after many years of valuable service.

Mr. Cass Smith is one of the best-known agricultural scientists in Western Australia, and one of Australia's leading plant pathologists.

Mr. Cass Smith saw war service in 1917-18 as a midshipman in the RNVR before starting his University studies. He attended Leeds University from 1919 to 1922 and graduated with the degree of Bachelor of Science in Agriculture.

He came to Australia in 1923 and joined the W.A. Department of Agriculture in the following year. For the next two years he served as an agricultural adviser in the Wheat Branch, then in 1925 left the Department to take up a virgin block in the wheat farming district west of Bullfinch. Over the next nine years his wheat crops averaged 13 bushels an acre, although this was then considered a marginal wheat growing area.

Mr. Cass Smith gave up farming to return to the Department of Agriculture in 1934 and was appointed Assistant Plant Pathologist. When the then Government Plant Pathologist H. A. Pittman resigned in 1938 Mr. Cass Smith was appointed to the position. He was promoted to Chief of the Biological Services Division (incorporating Plant Pathology, Entomology, Weeds and Seeds and Botany Branches) when this Division was formed in 1959.

As a plant pathologist Mr. Cass Smith made many valuable contributions to agriculture. His important work on such things as the rust-resistant Westralia runner bean, lime pelleting of leguminous seeds and the apple scab disease are well known to farmers; other work is well documented in past issues of this Journal, to which he has been a regular contributor.

He has conducted the University lecture course in Plant Pathology for the past 25 years.

Apart from his scientific achievements Mr. Cass Smith has developed the Department's Plant Pathology Branch into an efficient plant disease research and information unit which renders valuable service to other sections of the Department and other organisations, as well as farmers and the general public.

He is a foundation member and Past President of the W.A. Branch of the Australian Institute of Agricultural Science.

For some years Mr. Cass Smith has been interested in the fungal canker disease of the red flowering gum, which has ruined many plantings of this attractive tree. His spare time work on this problem has led to the selection of some immune trees which give promise for the control of the canker disease. He hopes to continue his work on this disease after his retirement.