

A Great Australian

(by B. Doman, ~ Past Principal, Hawkesbury Agricultural College)

Mr E.A. Southee, O.B.E., M.A. (Oxon), B.Sc., B.Sc.Agr. (Syd.), Principal of Hawkesbury Agricultural College from 1921 to 1954, died on 27th December, 1968, at the age of 78.

Born in Cootamundra on August 6th, 1890, Ethelbert Ambrook Southee received his early education at Cootamundra Superior Public School and Sydney High School. He entered the University of Sydney as a cadet of the Department of Agriculture where he was one of the four who comprised the first intake for the School of Agriculture. At the University he was President of the Student Christian Union and a Councillor of the Science Society. He graduated B.Sc. in 1911 and B.Sc.Agr. in 1913. He was selected New South Wales Rhodes Scholar for 1913 and entered Oxford University the same year. He became President of the University's Athletic Club and a member of St. John's College Advisory Council.

He joined the British Expeditionary Force in 1914 and served in Belgium, France and Italy, rising to the rank of Major. He was twice mentioned in despatches. In recognition of his meritorious service he was made an Officer of the British Empire on his discharge in 1919.

He graduated B.A. at Oxford University in 1919 and was later awarded an M.A. degree. He was made a fellow of the Linnean Society, London, and at the close of 1919 entered Cornell University in the United States of America as a graduate research student in plant breeding.

He passed the preliminary exam for a Doctor of Philosophy degree at Cornell, but terminated his course in 1921 before the degree could be conferred – to accept appointment, aged 32, as Principal of the New South Wales Department of Agriculture's, Hawkesbury Agriculture College. His professional career was unique in that he held the one post for 33 years until his retirement in 1954.

In the field of sport, Mr Southee's achievements were no less brilliant than on the scholastic, professional and military sides. Champion athlete of Sydney High School in 1907, he gained the "Double Blue" of both Sydney and Oxford Universities in Athletics and Rugby. He won Various Australian, New South Wales and

University Championship events and the 100 metres championship of the Allied forces in Italy in 1919.

In 1955 he was awarded the Farrer Memorial Medal, an annual award commemorating the work of Australia's pioneer wheat breeder, William Farrer, and honouring

the recipient for his distinguished service to agricultural science.

At his funeral on 30th December, 1968, one of his university contemporaries, himself a man of world-wide eminence in the field of agriculture, said simply and with characteristic humility: "We are witnessing the passing of a truly great Australian", and so we were.

