

THE UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

CITATION DELIVERED BY DR. W.J. MITCHELL, MEMBER OF THE UNIVERSITY COUNCIL ON THE OCCASION OF THE ADMISSION OF THISTLE YOLETTE STEAD TO THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF SCIENCE, *HONORIS CAUSA*, 9TH AUGUST, 1985.

Chancellor, I present to you Thistle Yolette Stead.

Thistle Y. Stead, who celebrated her 83rd birthday recently, has devoted the whole of her long working life to the preservation of Australia's natural environment.

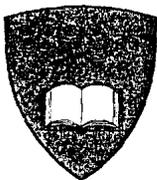
Born Thistle Harris, in July 1902, she was educated at Mosman Public School, Redlands and the University of Sydney. With Bachelor of Science and Master of Education degrees she became a lecturer in Biological Science at the Sydney Teachers' College.

For over thirty years the young men and women who came under the influence of Thistle Harris gained a lasting love and interest for Australia's native plants and wild flowers. To help teachers in the classroom to foster the interest of children in their physical environment, she produced *The Handbook of Nature Study for Teachers*, *The Teaching of Nature Study* and other teaching manuals which would aid teachers and students.

Her role of educator was not confined to teachers. From 1938, when *Wild Flowers of Australia* was published, her books were read by a growing number of people who wanted to know more about the flowers of the Australian bush or how best to cultivate wild flowers in their own gardens. Her readers were aided by *Australian Plants for the Garden*, *Eastern Australian Wildflowers*, *Alpine Plants of Australia*, *Plants Without Flowers*, and *Gardening With Australian Shrubs*.

The widespread use today of native plants and shrubs to beautify suburban streets, parking areas and gardens surrounding large buildings, can be seen as a testimonial to the type of books produced by Thistle Stead. The campus of the University of Wollongong is but one splendid example.

In addition to teaching and writing, Thistle Stead helped establish or further the work of a number of organisations which would promote the harmonious relationship between Australian people and their environment. She was secretary, then president, of the Wild Life Preservation Society of Australia, a councillor of the Australian Conservation Foundation, a member both of the Association of Environmental Studies and the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects. For her achievements in all these areas she was awarded the Australian Natural History Medallion in 1963.



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Thistle married David G. Stead, an academic colleague, in 1951. After his death she worked to establish the David G. Stead Memorial Wildlife Research Foundation, of which she was made Deputy President. The success of the Foundation was marked by the opening in 1973 of a field study centre at 'Wirrimbirra' – an aboriginal word which means "to preserve". It is a bushland property of some 90 hectares at Bargo, 100 kilometres south of Sydney on the Hume Highway. 'Wirrimbirra' became a location for the propagation and sale of native plants, a centre of education for school children and a native plant sanctuary which could be visited by members of the public and tourists. Well known to Australian botanists and other scholars from many parts of the world interested in our indigenous plant life, 'Wirrimbirra' is a symbol of Thistle Stead's devotion both to the personal and the universal.

When she began her work of educating Australians about their own environment half a century ago, there seemed to be sufficient natural bushland still remaining to allow for study and recreation for the future. In those days Thistle Stead was amongst the few in the academic and general community who recognised the necessity for the retention and preservation of the natural environment. Today there is a reversal of that situation: there is a scarcity of untouched bushland available for research or for enjoyment, and even that is threatened by development; but there is a much greater appreciation of its importance by a larger number of the community.

In awarding the honorary degree of Doctor of Science, the University of Wollongong is honouring Thistle Stead as a pioneer and a missionary; it is paying homage as well to the cause for which she has worked with such distinction, the sustaining of our natural heritage.

Chancellor, it is my privilege and pleasure to present to you Thistle Yolette Stead for admission to the degree of Doctor of Science, *Honoris causa*.