

Ian Thomas – a great loss to the cotton industry

By Cleve Rogan

I can't remember the first time I met Ian – or the last time. But I do know that every time I met him, it was an enjoyable occasion

Ian always had a smile on his face and a twinkle in his eye. Any industry event was enlivened by his presence.

In many ways, he was 'Mr Cotton' in St George – a true industry leader in every sense of the word.

He was a pioneer grower in the area and was a tireless worker on a vast range of industry bodies and issues.

And he didn't neglect the farming side of the operation. In fact, he was an early adopter of new technology and a real leader in areas such as BMP before the term was invented.

There was no-one more qualified to give a cotton industry eulogy at Ian's funeral than his close friend and fellow St George cotton grower, Cleve Rogan. Following is an excerpt of that eulogy.

David Dowling – Editor

Ian Thomas – A great man, a good friend, and a sad loss to our cotton industry, his family and his friends.

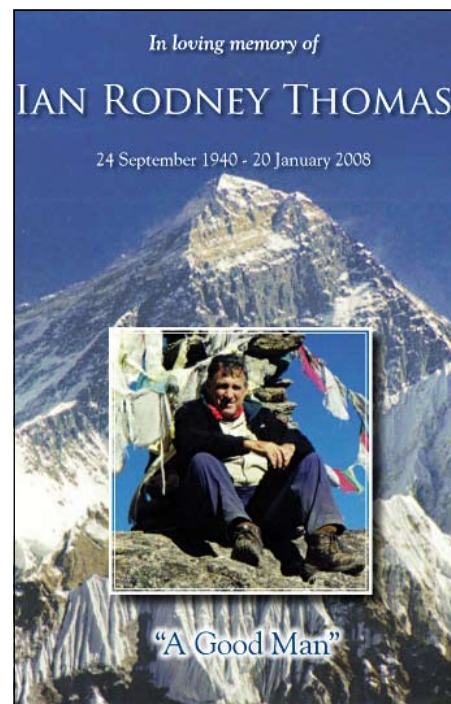
After sharing many trips with Ian going to industry meetings, I very quickly realised how passionate and forward thinking he was about the cotton industry.

Ian was a strong advocate for the environment, with a committed and careful approach to crop rotation and was at the forefront of sustainable farming systems practice.

Long before the Cotton Industry had terms like Best Management Practice, Natural Resource Management, Water Use Efficiency and Area Wide Management, Ian was already implementing and practicing these principles on farm. So it's no surprise that he was part of the pilot farm study for Best Management Practice and was one of the first farms to be Best Management Practice accredited. He was also among the first in Queensland to conduct water use efficiency trials, but had been using these concepts on farm since the mid-1970s.

Ian was a fervent supporter of practices to encourage biodiversity and wildlife on cotton farms.

The planting of trees and shrubs has been a vital element in the "Bloomfield" farm plan. Over 4000 trees and shrubs have been planted around the edges of paddocks and dams to create wildlife corridors, windbreaks to protect young crops and to lower a water table which was rising from a leaching above-ground government supply channel.



Ian has also had specially designed bat boxes manufactured and installed, so as to attract the small insectivorous bats to colonise and prey on the moths and insects in crops.

Ian commented to me on one of our meeting trips that he hadn't collected hard data to support the benefits of his tree plantings, but driving around the farm observing the advantages spoke for itself.

A favourite saying of Ian's was "You know when you have it right when you pick up your soil, smell it and think you could eat it".

Ian acted as a collaborator with the cotton plant breeders and seed companies for 34 years, growing new varieties for evaluation in small plots and large seed trials.

Ian represented the cotton growers on many boards and committees. These include:

- Director of the Cotton Marketing Board for 14 years from 1975 to 1989, and was instrumental in the deregulation of the board prior to its listing as Queensland Cotton Holdings. This position involved monthly meetings in Brisbane combined with trips to Taiwan, Japan, Korea and Hong Kong to promote cotton and sales and marketing.



A proud winner of the 2001 Cottongrower of the Year award.

- Director of the Cotton Research and Development Corporation (CRDC) 1990 to 1993 and was on the Cotton Research Council for many years prior to the formation of the CRDC.
- Committee Member of the Australian Cotton Growers Research Association (ACGRA) for 16 years from 1984 to 2000. He was also on many committees within the ACGRA that advised on research proposals and projects. Ian was ACGRA Cotton Conference Committee member as well, helping to coordinate and run the conference every two years.

Added to these commitments, Ian also served many terms on local irrigator bodies, the St George Cotton Growers Association and was a strong supporter of Cotton Australia.

Ian's dedication to farming and his industry contributions have been acknowledged by many local and national awards, including;

- 1972 Local Cotton Grower of the Year;
- 2000 Local BMP Cotton Grower of the Year;
- 2001 National Cotton Grower of the Year (Under 600 hectares);
- 2002 Local Service to Industry Award; and,
- 2005 Local Cotton Grower of the Year.

After winning the National award, Ian commented to me that it was like receiving a Logie. You could see he was very proud of the farm's achievements and the team effort involved.

Ian has been described as;

- One of the pioneers of the cotton industry with a positive passion and dedication and with a very strong grower interest.
- A true ambassador.
- An early adopter of new research, pro-



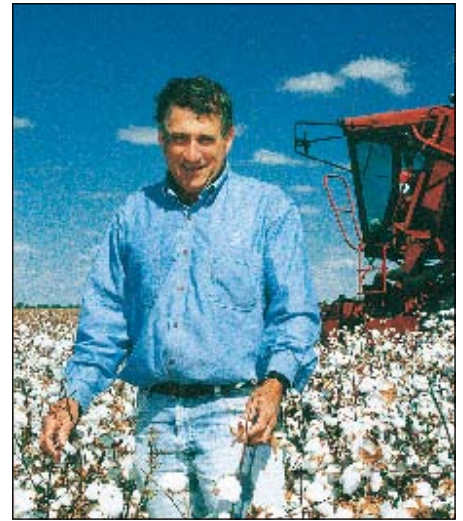
Ian in front of some of the many trees he planted at 'Bloomfield'.

viding good sound advice and observations to the researchers and industry.

- A genuine good bloke with a generous, approachable, likable style.
- A man with a good sense of fairness and respect who was always there to help make things work.
- Having the ability to have a good laugh that rubbed off on everybody involved, combined with excellent old fashioned country hospitality.

We are all very privileged to have had Ian in our lives and in our industry.

To sum up Ian's legacy: "It is we, who have seen further, by standing on the shoulders of giants of our industry ... like Ian Thomas."



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