

THE FASHION ARCHIVES

Patrick Woulfe

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An astute business man and innovative retailer, Patrick Woulfe directed Woulfe and Sons, a large tailoring business with several locations in Queensland.

BUSINESS ANNOUNCE- MENTS.

WOULFE AND SONS.

Messrs. Woulfe and Son's representative, Mr. T. M. Donovan, is at Adair's Hotel, Herberton, from March 1, on a visit. Suit buyers of the Tableland may "see the largest range of suitings in the North." Measurements taken by expert.

Woulfe and Sons representative visits Herberton, 1935 The Cairns Post, National Library of Australia



Portion of Messrs. Woulfe and Son's Showrooms at 15-17 Adelaide Street. The Largest Retail Stock of Australian Woollens in Queensland. (Adv.)

Woulfe and Son's Showroom, Adelaide Street, Brisbane, 1932 The Brisbane Courier, National Library of Australia



Brisbane Street looking west, from East Street corner, Ipswich, 1959, (Woulfe and Sons signage visible) Ipswich Library & Information Service, Ipswich City Council, Whitehead Studios Historical Collection



View along Adelaide Street from George Street with the buildings decorated for the Royal Visit, 1954, (Woulfe & Sons can be seen in the background) John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland, Neg: 260739

Who: Patrick Woulfe, Woulfe & Sons.

What: Queensland tailor and owner of Woulfe & Sons stores.

When: Patrick Woulfe was born in 1891, and died in 1948. He was at the helm of Woulfe & Sons by 1913, and by the late 1930s employed over 400 staff. The store was still operating in the 1950s.

Where: Woulfe & Sons main store was in Brisbane City, located at the George Street end of Adelaide Street. There were Woulfe and Sons stores in Toowoomba and Rockhampton. Surviving images also suggest a later business in Ipswich. Alongside these locations, Woulfe and Sons operated a mail-order business, and frequently sent tailoring staff to regional destinations for consultations with members of the public.

Why: The Woulfe and Sons business was a leading retailer in Queensland menswear for several decades, operating in an era when the majority of men wore suits as the mainstay of their wardrobe.

Patrick Woulfe developed innovative marketing slogans and buying techniques to keep prices low, dealing directly with wool mills. The title of “Queensland’s Great Mill to Wearer Tailors” was utilised in newspaper advertising columns to deliberately set Woulfe and Sons apart from its competition.

Sales, fabric arrivals, and new store developments were advertised in local newspapers on a regular basis. For instance, in 1934, an article appeared in *The Courier Mail* announcing a 'new shop front' had been installed in the Adelaide Street Woulfe and Sons premises, including large display windows, and, "excellent lighting, now so effective and brilliant as to show up, as in day light, the weave and toning of the suitings displayed. Suit buyers will appreciate this particular convenience." Much like a department store, Woulfe focussed on the huge variety of choice available to his customers at a variety of price points.

Other 'innovations' that Woulfe regularly advertised related to the mail-order side of the business. Articles from the time emphasise the complex systems Woulfe and Sons developed to ensure accurate at-home measurements for 'big city' results. During tough times, such as The Great Depression, Woulfe ran advertising segments that cleverly played on the downturn, with lines such as, "Surmount depression – don't bow down to it" is the advice tendered by Woulfe and Son... They have cut deeply into the word "de- pression," and have- adopted a slogan from the latter half of it – "Press On." "

Patrick Woulfe died in 1948, but the Woulfe and Sons businesses seems to have continued, with some evidence to suggest stores were operating in to the 1970s. Curiously, an obituary of Patrick Woulfe's mother, Mrs. Sarah Woulfe, from 1931, suggests that *she* originally founded the Woulfe and Sons company. Contradictorily, many Patrick Woulfe obituaries describe him as the founder. However, records support the possibility that the business name was registered well before 1913. Either way, Patrick was a leading retailer in his day, running a successful tailoring empire for several decades.

by *The Fashion Archives*

The Fashion Archives' Reading List:

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