

## The End of an Era

After almost 36 years, the Windsor business and a family retailing tradition of more than 173 years ended in 1998, when Ross and Hunter had reached their 70s and were looking forward to retirement. The business and buildings were sold in three separate lots: firstly the hardware section in 1996, then ladies wear in 1998, and finally menswear on Friday 9 April 1999. It was around this time that a number of fixtures and fittings were donated to Hawkesbury Historical Society. These items formed the basis of the museum's 2013 exhibition.



Remarkably, the brothers never missed a day of business in over 36 years. Each day they travelled to and from work together, sat at a joined desk and always did their own paperwork. What set Hordern's apart was its commitment to diversity, as specialisation moved stealthily into the retail market. This approach continued up until the final closing of its doors, with the store continuing to carry everything from underwear to hardware.



*'a family retailing tradition of more than 173 years'*



# HORDERN'S

From Underwear to Hardware: The Hordern Brothers story

A HAWKESBURY REGIONAL MUSEUM INFORMATION SHEET



## The Hordern Brothers

Hunter and Ross Hordern were fifth generation descendants of Anthony Hordern, a famous name in the history of Australian retail (see below). In 1962 the brothers came to Windsor, and bought the Pulsford family business, re-naming it *H & R Hordern – Value Department Store*. Asked in later years why they chose Windsor, they said 'because we like the area, it's slowly expanding, and dramatic things don't happen there.' (*Hunter Hordern, June 1983*).

## History of the Building

The building, on the corner of George and Fitzgerald Streets, goes back to 1919. It was constructed by J.G. Taylor to a design by architects Ross & Rowe. It included a banking chamber, and a large shop which was available for lease. The total cost of construction was £5,071. In 1935 the building was sold to Maurice Pulsford, a local businessman for £3,500 (it is believed that only the shop changed hands, hence the discrepancy in the price).

## M.H. Pulsford & Co.

The original Pulsford store was located next to the Old Post Office (currently the site of the Post Office Arcade). It became known as *The Manchester House* and by 1908 they had adopted the motto 'Always Ready'. Pulsford was known for his energy, enterprise and enthusiasm, and his business expanded and prospered for more than 50 years.

In 1910 Pulsford acquired William Beard's adjacent ironmongery, and after a few years the business had outgrown both

Images:

**Front Cover:** H&R Hordern Store, cnr Fitzgerald and George Sts, Windsor c.1965. Hawkesbury Library Service.

**Page 2, left:** M.H. Pulsford & Co, Mercery Department c.1950. L-R : Employees Brian Dodd, Dennis Simmons, Trelve Simmons, Horrie Whalan & owner Maurice Pulsford. Hawkesbury Regional Museum Collection.

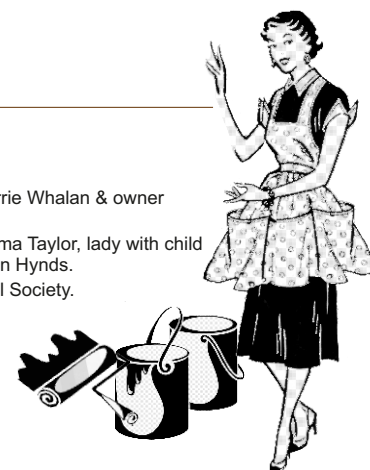
**Page 2, right:** M.H. Pulsford & Co. Ladies and Haberdashery Departments c. 1950. L-R: Employees Rita Mortley, Noeline Case, Norma Taylor, lady with child (customers), Mr Cramp (from Manchester Dept.), Irena Gudakate (from Scheyville Migrant Hostel), Maurice Pulsford (owner) and Jean Hynds.

**Page 3, top:** Hordern Bros. Hardware Department, Fitzgerald St, Windsor, 1996. Daphne Kingston Collection, Hawkesbury Historical Society.

**Page 3, below:** Home of the Pulsford Family, later it became Hordern's Hardware Department. Hawkesbury Library Service.

**Page 4, left:** Ross and Hunter Hordern in the Menswear Department, 1998. Hawkesbury Independent.

**Page 4, right:** Hordern Brothers Menswear Department, 1998. Daphne Kingston Collection, Hawkesbury Historical Society.





premises, and moved into a new modern emporium built in conjunction with the Government Savings Banks on the land on the corner of George and Fitzgerald Streets. M.H. Pulsford and Co. opened in January 1920. They advertised as 'The Friendly Corner Store' selling hardware, paints, sporting goods and floor coverings, as well as cloth, clothing and sewing materials.

Pulsford steered the business successfully through both world wars and the Great Depression, making it the leading store in the district. He was regarded as an outstanding citizen, and supported numerous community and sporting activities, including Windsor Public School and the Hawkesbury Benevolent Society, on whose board he served for 45 years.

Maurice and his wife Lilian had three children. Daughter Nancy married the 'boy across the road' John J. Paine, in 1936, aligning two prominent Hawkesbury



families. Nancy's sister, Esme, was bridesmaid, and the wedding was a major social event, with both families being known so well through their respective local businesses that, 'their popularity has become a byword throughout the community, and it was therefore, not to be surprised that the church was unable to hold the people that came to witness the ceremony'. (*Windsor & Richmond Gazette, 11 December 1936*)

Son Brian, on return from service with the Royal Australian Air Force, joined his father as co-manager of the business and became sole manager after his father's death in 1952. He continued his father's legacy, being involved with the community and running the family business until it was sold to H & R Hordern in 1962.

## Retail in the blood: The Hordern Family Dynasty

The origins of the Hordern Family as retailing giants started in the early years of the colony. In March 1825, Anthony and Ann Hordern arrived from England on the *Phoenix*. They settled in King Street, Sydney, and soon after, opened a successful corset and bonnet shop which was operated by Ann.

Anthony and Ann had two daughters and five sons, four of whom followed their parents into retailing. With the third generation came consolidation and expansion, and at one time there were six different Hordern family stores. Of the six, *Anthony Hordern & Sons* was the business destined to become a retailing giant. During the 1880s several surrounding buildings were purchased and reconstructed into the substantial *Anthony Hordern & Sons Palace Emporium* in Haymarket. By 1895, it was the biggest

store in the southern hemisphere. In 1901 a fire gutted the building and destroyed millions of pounds worth of merchandise. It was rebuilt on an even grander scale, and in 1905 re-opened as *The New Palace Emporium - Universal Providers*. It covered the best part of a city block and had three road frontages - George, Pitt and Goulburn Streets.

In 1926 it was sold for more than \$500 million in today's money. That left only one surviving store, *Hordern Brothers*, which continued quietly in family hands until 1959, when, after much agonising, the family board members sold their shares to the publicly listed *Anthony Hordern & Sons*. It was then that Hunter and Ross Hordern started looking about for a new business venture. In 1970, *Anthony Hordern & Sons* was bought out by Walton's Ltd, and closed down in February 1973.

## Personal service and value

The Hordern brothers relied on conventional retailing wisdom such as 'the customer is always right' and 'feet through the door'. They flew their flag out the front of the store, and their aim was to give 'personal service and value in the old tradition'. (*Australian Business Magazine, 1983*)

Like the Pulsfords before them, they stocked a wide range of merchandise, including gelignite, guns and ammunition, as well as manchester (sheets and towels), haberdashery (knitting and sewing), sports equipment, floor coverings and clothing. Dresses were available in half-sizes, and fitters and dressmakers were employed to ensure a perfect fit (this was before the introduction of stretch fabrics and numbered sizes). If something had to be ordered, the store promised that it 'would be attended to promptly'. Nails were sold

by weight, and carpet and linoleum floor coverings were often rolled out onto the footpath to be measured and cut. Extra supplies of linoleum were brought in if floods looked likely.

A fondly-remembered feature of shopping at Hordern's was its 'cash carrier' or 'cash railway', which had been in use since the Pulsford's time. Cash was placed in a hollow timber cup, which was then attached to a small carriage. Using a rubber spring mechanism, the carriage was propelled up a wire to the cashier's office on the mezzanine level, where a sprung tooth stopped it from returning. The cashier recorded the transaction and then placed any change and documentation in the cup, which was returned under gravity to the sales desk by triggering the holding tooth.

Staff and customers had to be very careful to avoid being struck by a carriage as it thundered along its wire track (victims said the experience was like being struck by a wooden mallet). In time it was replaced by cash registers and Bankcard (the first widely accepted credit card to be used in Australia).

Meanwhile, the business thrived. New opportunities presented themselves, such as the water skiing crowd, for which power boating accessories and even boats were brought in. And older customers remained loyal – perhaps because they could still buy items that were fast going out of fashion, such as 'foundation garments' (supporting undergarments, such as a corsets or girdles).

There were attractive window displays and fashion parades, and participation in community events and promotions. 'Port-A-Gas – make a cup of tea in just 5 mins!' boasted a 1960s display at the Hawkesbury Show. Buses were stocked up to deliver goods to outlying areas such as Wisemans Ferry.

By 1979 the fashion business had undergone something of a revolution, and a large men's clothing department took shape next to the original building - the biggest change to the business since World War II. Hordern Brothers now comprised three adjoining shops, a staff of nearly 20, and a retailing space of 1300 square metres.

But the experience of retail shopping changed greatly towards the end of the twentieth century, and by the 1990s, even glow-in-the-dark boxer shorts were not enough to attract the new generation of shoppers. Large shopping centres, mass produced goods, new technology and the popularity of credit cards all signalled a new era in retail.



*'Their aim was to give personal service and value in the old tradition'*

