

HISTORY

The Reddan Family and Reddan & Mellor

Mention the words Reddan & Mellor to any long-term Bundaberg resident and be prepared for the wave of reminiscences that follow. This Bundaberg institution was an important part of the lives of people for generations, marking the purchase of material for the first school uniform, or the first pair of school shoes, or even, (although few details are given), the first bra...

At the time of its closure in 1985, the firm Reddan & Mellor had been trading for almost 100 years, and had evolved from a Drapers store to an emporium that sold not just material, but also clothing, footwear, and what is often mysteriously referred to as 'specialty goods'.

Michael Reddan

Michael Reddan was not from Bundaberg – he was born in Penrith, New South Wales in 1860, and after finishing school at Marist Brothers, Sydney, he apprenticed as a store clerk with the large Sydney firm of Anthony Horderns. By the time he left in 1882, Michael Reddan had a thorough knowledge of the drapery business, and was in charge of the Country Order Department. Deciding to move interstate, he travelled to Maryborough and worked for Stuparts



for a year, then accepted a position with Buss and Co. Michael Reddan arrived in Bundaberg on the 26th June 1883, on the steamer *Governor Blackall*.

While working for Buss and Co., Michael Reddan became close friends with another employee, William Buxton Mellor. The two young men decided to try their luck with their own business, and signed a partnership for a Drapers, to be called Reddan & Mellor, on 1st May 1886. Each man brought capital of £350 to the business, which was located in premises in Bourbon Street. The decision of where to situate the shop was left to Michael Reddan, and according to Doreen Reddan, he chose the area in the second block east of the Post Office, because he believed the town would develop in that direction. Of course, once the Burnett Traffic Bridge was built in 1900, the development in fact extended west down Bourbon Street.

Early Years

The Ledgers from 1886 record that both men paid themselves a salary of £13 per month, and Living Expenses for Michael Reddan for the years 1886-87 were



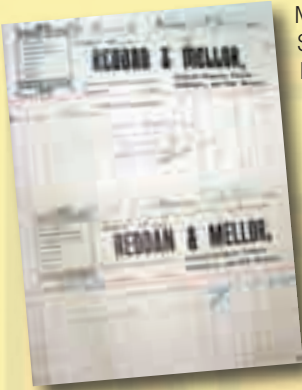


£201, and William Buxton Mellor £185. At this time, Michael Reddan was living in premises on Targo Street, but like many other early families, decided to move to safer ground after the 1893 floods. A block of land was purchased at 268 Bourbong Street, and in 1908 Reddan House was built.

Some of the first entries in the Reddan ledgers describe the cost of fitting out the new shop premises - approximately £188, which included such items as a Perfume Stand, twelve chairs, window chandeliers, boot racks and hat stands. The most expensive item was the Milner's cast iron safe, which cost £35.

The stock records show that the major item listed was Clothing, Woollens and Mercery. (Mercery is a French term, which originally referred to silk, linen, and textiles imported to England in the 12th Century. The term later came to mean goods made of these materials, and the sellers of those goods). Other stock listed included





Millinery, Boots and Shoes, Dresses, Manchester and 'Fancy and Hosiery'.

Each of the men took on different roles within the business – Michael Reddan was the Business Manager and often seen on the floor of the

shop chatting to customers, while William Mellor ran the office. The business was prosperous from the start, and by 1916 employed thirty staff in various areas. The wages of the staff ranged from 3 pounds, 10 shillings per week down to 7 shillings per week.

The customer lists in the ledger for 1887-88 mention such well known names and businesses as Walter Adams, H. T. Christen, J. F. Davies the Ironmonger, the Fleming family who owned the gasworks, W. H. McCann of the Custom House Hotel and D. F. Johnston of Colanne Station. Other names listed as customers include Peter Neilson of the Royal Hotel, William Redmond of the Queens Hotel, Miss Partridge (Dressmaker), the Sisters of St Joseph Convent and Alexander Walker of Gin Gin.

Over the years, Reddan & Mellor flourished, and became well-known throughout central Queensland, with customers in all the major regional centres close to Bundaberg. The two men remained partners in the store until

the death of William Mellor on Dec 23, 1926, and several months later Michael Reddan passed away on April 20, 1927. M. J. Reddan left his shares in Reddan & Mellor equally to Esme and John Reddan, and by that time, the next generation of the Reddan family was working in the family business – son John Reddan.

John Cyril Reddan

After leaving Brisbane Grammar School, John Reddan had started his retail employment as a shop assistant with McWhirters, in the Valley. After several years there, he returned to Bundaberg and the family business, where he worked until enlisting with the A.I.F. in the First World War. John Reddan served in France, and was awarded the Military Medal at the French village of Villiers Carbonel. After returning to Bundaberg, he built a large residence on Woongarra Street in 1920, and named it Carbonelle in memory of his war experience.

While suffering from the effects of gassing during his war service, John Reddan still took over the management of the family firm, and unlike his father, was active in both local business and community development in Bundaberg. He was a founding member of the Bundaberg Rotary Club, a President of the Bundaberg Racing Club and an early member of the Barga Golf Club. John



Reddan handed over the business to his son Jack Reddan at the end of World War II, and after a long illness, died in hospital in December 1953.

Mayor Fred Buss, in a letter of condolence to his widow Lily, wrote of “...his high courage in war and through a long illness, his exemplary service to his City, his loyalty to friends who will miss him sorely and above all, his abiding love for his ‘own folk’.”

Jack Geddes Reddan

J.C. Reddan retired from the business in 1945, and his son Jack took over the running of the store after he came back from serving in the Second First Anti-Aircraft Regiment in the SW Pacific area. At this time William Luth Mellor was still also working in the store, although he was the last of the Mellor family to do so. William was the grandson of William Buxton Mellor, and worked in the store for 44 years before leaving in 1976. The Mellor family sold their shares in the company to the Reddan family, however the business kept trading as Reddan & Mellor, at the request of Jack Reddan. Jack ran the business and was often seen behind the counter in the Men’s Department. He was a third-generation trustee of the Bundaberg racecourse, as well as a third generation member of the Burnett Club. Jack was involved in various capacities with the Bundaberg Surf Life Saving Club, as well as being a President of Bundaberg Legacy. He finally retired in 1979, and the fourth generation of the Reddan family took over as Store Managers – his daughters

Mrs Cary Honor and Mrs Megan Potter.

Jack Geddes Reddan passed away on December 26, 1981 and Reddan & Mellor remained in business until 1984, but the long hours and demands of family began to

make the business less viable. When the Reddan family announced it was closing the doors of Reddan & Mellor at the end of February, 1984, it was for family, not business reasons. The closing-down sale was a huge event, with hundreds of people crowding into the store. According to the News-Mail of 1st February, the crowd was so bad at one stage the staff had to close the doors and admit a person as a person exited the store.

After the store closed, the 2000 square metre property was auctioned by Brisbane agents A.V. Postle and Co. on 5 April, and a century of trading by one of Bundaberg’s oldest family businesses came to an end.

While *Reddan House* is no longer standing, the house built by J. C. Reddan, *Carbonelle*, is still as elegant and well-kept as when it was built in 1920 – a reminder of a family and business that was a Bundaberg institution for almost 100 years.



Acknowledgements

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All photographs are part of the Picture Bundaberg collection, donated by Doreen Reddan.

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Sue Gammon

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