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RONALD DAVID BENNETT The Menswear Fashion King

Ron Bennett's grandfather John, a hatter in Stockport, Cheshire, emigrated to Sydney in 1884. He opened a shop in Newtown selling top hats, gloves and canes.

He made his own wooden blocks in the shape of heads of leading citizens so that they would not require a fitting with each new purchase. Sir Henry Parkes was a frequent customer.

Right from the outset, the business was aimed at the wealthy in the community. Ron's father, David, entered the business about 1930 and introduced mercery, seeking offcuts of material so that he could tailor trousers for 25 shillings a pair.

The business grew rapidly when he began selling shirts.

Born in 1926, Ron attended St Andrew's Cathedral College where he became head chorister. He won prizes for singing but he did not like school and was eager to join his father's business which he did at 16 years of age.

He eventually took control of the business, expanded the product ranges and changed the name from J T Bennett and Sons to Ron Bennett.

Ron's regular visits to America on buying trips attracted him to American culture and he met many leading personalities including Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis Jnr.

As a result of these contacts. Bennett tried his hand at being a showbusiness entrepreneur and he brought jazz drummer Gene Krupa and other musicians to Australia. He made a lot of friends but lost a lot of money.



A friend to the famous ... Ron Bennett with Dionne Warwick in 1966.

He also imported flash cars from Detroit - Ford Mustangs and Thunderbirds, Buick Rivieras, Lincoln Continentals, Pontiacs, Plymouths and Chevrolets.

Ron Bennett loved water-skiing. He met Margaret during a water-skiing party. They married in 1953 and spent their honeymoon on the Hawkesbury.

He taught their four children to ski by tying the tow rope around his waist and running down the side of their large family swimming pool. He then fixed the rope to the car and drove it by the pool.

He nearly lost his life when he poured petrol on a section of the Hawkesbury and, having had it ignited, he skied through the flames only to receive serious burns when the boat driver slowed too soon. He was pleased that the photograph made the front page of the papers.

Bennett opened a shop at Top Ryde within sight of grazing cattle. He lost money when he opened a store at Parramatta but succeeded at Bankstown Square.

He was largely responsible for introducing Californian mens clothing, as seen in the movies, to Australia.

He wrote in an early 1960's catalogue:

Every morning of every day, you have a decision to make - an important decision, your choice of clothes. Whatever you put on in that first five minutes could affect your whole future.

Bennett had notable successes. Charcoal grey suits with pink shirts, three button jackets with narrow lapels and striped shirts with button-down collars were all the rage but pale blue narrow, square at the bottom 'Mitchell' ties as worn by singer Guy Mitchell were a failure.

Ron Bennett, the millionaire menswear guru, sold his 19 stores in Australia in the 1970's to the Corporate Apparel Group.

Bro Ronald David Bennett was made a mason on 9 October 1945 in Lodge Perfect No 583 at Croydon. He was a Lewis aged 19 years. He was passed Fellowcraft on 3 December 1945 and raised a Master Mason on 25 February 1946.

He called off on 9 June 1953.

Ron Bennett died in Concord Hospital on 6 August 2003 survived by Margaret and their four children, Deborah, Matthew, Rebecca and Prudence.

The funeral service was held at St Andrew's Cathedral, Sydney.

REFERENCES

The Sydney Morning Herald, August 7, 2003.

Ibid, August 23-24, 2003.
