The Australian
Women's Register

**Entry type:** Person
**Entry ID:** AWE3123

# Holmes, Pat

(1915 - 1992)

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| **Born** | 19150317, Sydney New South Wales Australia |
| **Died** | 19921025, Sydney New South Wales Australia |
| **Occupation** | Photo Journalist, Photographer |

## Summary

Pat Holmes is widely recognised as the first woman to have worked as a full-time photojournalist on an Australian newspaper. Initially working as a studio portrait photographer in Sydney, Holmes took a position as press photographer for *The Sun* during WW2. In 1946, Holmes produced the iconic photograph *New Year's Eve, Kings Cross*.

## Details

Pat Holmes is widely recognised as the first woman to have worked as a full-time photojournalist on an Australian newspaper.

She was born on 17 March 1915, in Sydney, NSW. She received her first Box Brownie camera at the age of ten and developed an interest in photography while attending Frensham School in Mittagong (Wilfred West School), where the headmistress encouraged the girls to pursue careers rather than viewing marriage as their only option.

Holmes taught herself darkroom skills by following the instructions given on the packets of darkroom developer chemicals and using the school's darkroom. She was still at school when she first met the photographer Harold Cazneaux, who had been employed by the school's board to prepare a book entitled *The Frensham Book*, a pictorial record of the school's environment. She helped him carry his equipment during his stay in Mittagong and was greatly influenced by him to become a photographer. In 1931 she left school and began an apprenticeship with Cazneaux at his studio in Roseville, even though her parents wanted her to become a kindergarten teacher. Apparently she approached Cazneaux and asked him to 'rescue her' by taking her on (Hall 101). She worked in his studio for two years.

Holmes travelled to England in 1937 as a member of the first Australian Women's Cricket team, where she played three test matches. The team returned to Australia soon after, but she elected to stay on in England, working at a variety of photography studios. She was mainly doing retouching but she was more interested in darkroom work. She eventually found a darkroom position in a London studio and remained there for eighteen months before returning to Australia. Work was difficult to come by in Sydney but she eventually secured a position, working for Monte Luke at his Castlereagh Street Studio in 1940. One year later she established her own portrait business, working from a darkroom she had established at home, becoming quite skilled at photographing children.

In 1943 Holmes took a job as a press photographer for *The Sun*. It was a position that offered her a variety of work and she continued to work there until 1948. One of her iconic photographs was taken at this time: *New Year's Eve, Kings Cross*, 1946. The image captured the exuberance and excitement of a group of young women gathering to celebrate New Year's Eve. She left *The Sun,* in 1948, just before her marriage to a Mr Stuart. She went onto have three children and six grandchildren.

Interviewed many years later Holmes recalled her time as a female press photographer: 'I was a little hesitant at first when I went out on jobs, but I soon realised that I had to take the initiative. It was mainly the very young and older men that I worked with during the war years. Half the staff was in uniform. It was strange with all the young men away. Then the men came back and life settled down. I missed newspaper work at first when I left in 1948. It had been exciting. Life was flat without the variety. But then I became involved with my family when I married soon after leaving *The Sun*. That has been a wonderful time too' (Christine Gillespie, Interview; cited in Hall 269).

Pat Holmes died on 25 October 1992.

## Collections

National Gallery of Australia

## Content added for The Women's Pages research project, last modified 16 September 2013

Holmes was educated at Frensham, later the Winifred West School, where she was encouraged by West to pursue a career in photography. There, in the late 1920s, she met photographer Harold Cazneaux, who was compiling a pictorial record of the school environment (*The Frensham Book*). When Holmes left school in 1931, she approached Cazneaux to teach her photography, and she worked in his Roseville studio for two years.

In 1937, Holmes became a member of the first Australian Women's Cricket team to tour England. A keen sportswoman, she scored 176 runs in the three tests played. She remained in England until 1939, working in a London printing studio. On her return to Australia, Holmes continued working on her own commissions at home. She searched for employment in Sydney photographic studios for a year before finding work with Monte Luke in Castlereagh Street. In 1943 she was offered a job by Associated Press, and joined the staff of *The Sun* as a press photographer. She left the paper in 1948, shortly before she married.

Holmes died in Sydney in 1992, survived by three children and six grandchildren.

## Events

**1981 - 1981**
Pat Holmes' work featured in *Australian Women Photographers 1840-1950*

**1988 - 1988**
Pat Holmes' work featured in *Shades of Light*

## Published resources

**Exhibition Catalogue**
Australian Women Photographers 1840-1950, 1981

**Newspaper Article**
Crowded Days Ahead, Jarrett, Pat,
http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article37045153

Lessons of Tour Will Benefit S.A.,
http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article55072981

Photographs show how image of Australian woman has changed in 150 years, Geissler, Marie,
http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article102076743

**Book Section**
Pat Holmes, Hall, Barbara, 1995

**Resource Section**
Pat Holmes,
https://www.daao.org.au/bio/pat-holmes/

**Resource**
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

**Book**
Australian Women Photographers 1840 - 1960, Hall, Barbara and Mather, Jenni, 1986

**Site Exhibition**
The Women's Pages: Australian Women and Journalism since 1850, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2008,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/cal/cal-home.html

**Edited Book**
Heritage : the national women's art book, 500 works by 500 Australian women artists from colonial times to 1955, Kerr, Joan, 1995

**Author Details**
Barbara Lemon

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