

PATERSON, Frederick Woolnough



Frederick Woolnough Paterson

Rank: Private

Service Number: 53074

Unit: 1 to 8 (QLD) Reinforcements (May-November 1918)

Place of Birth: Gladstone, Queensland

Date of Birth: 13 June 1897

Enlisted at Rockhampton 7 January 1918, age 20 years 7 months. Next-of-kin was his father, Mr WH (William Hunter) Paterson, "Helensburgh", Gladstone, Queensland. On enlistment he was 5 feet 7.5 inches and weighed 128 lbs (9 stone 2 lbs). His chest measurement was 30 – 34 inches. His occupation was University student. After serving in England and France, and returned to Australia on 23 April 1919, and was discharged from service on 18 May 1919.

From "What's in a Name? The stories behind the street names of Gladstone, Qld" by Paulette Flint: *Frederick Woolnough Paterson was Australia's only Communist Member of Parliament. Paterson was one of nine children, five boys and four girls, born in a boarding house at Gladstone Meatworks on 13 June 1897 to William Hunter Paterson and his wife Edith, nee Jeffery. His father, who was born in Glasgow, Scotland, had emigrated to Queensland at the age of 16, and had variously worked as a station manager and teamster in Central Queensland's early pioneering days. In Gladstone he worked with a horse and cart as a deliveryman, and in also farmed pigs for a living. When the Gladstone Hospital was opened in March 1890, William and Edith Paterson were appointed Wardsman and Matron.*

Fred attended Gladstone State School (now known as Gladstone Central State School) in Auckland Street after being enrolled by his mother in 1901 at the tender age of 3½ years. The Headmaster at the time was William Morley who was beginning his 26th year as headmaster. In 1910 Paterson

joined a scholarship class and sat for the bursary examination at the end of the year. Only ten bursaries were awarded in Queensland each year, seven for the boys and three for the girls. Each winner of a bursary was granted free education at any secondary school and 30 pounds per year for three years. Paterson gained second place in Queensland in the examination and was able to commence secondary education at Rockhampton Grammar School in 1911. Coming from a poor family, this was the only means by which Paterson could access further education.

Paterson was a brilliant scholar, and he soon won another scholarship, this time to Brisbane Grammar School. He won the TJ Byrnes Medal for topping the State in the Junior Public Examinations. After completing his secondary education another scholarship took him to Queensland University to study for a Bachelor of Arts, where he was then appointed Rhodes Scholar for Queensland to attend Oxford University in England. He was to study theology, having come from a family with a devout Church of England background.

In January 1918 Paterson enlisted in the AIF and embarked on the "Osterley" to Liverpool in May of that year. He was involved in training when the war ended, and he returned to Australia. He then took up the Rhodes scholarship awarded earlier. Although he completed a Bachelor of Arts degree his beliefs had changed and, when on the ship back to Australia he met a steward who told him he had joined the Socialist Party. In 1923 Paterson joined the Communist Party. He began to study law in 1923 and was admitted to the Bar in 1931.

Paterson married Lucy Ethel Blackman in 1924. Theirs was a childless marriage and they were divorced in 1931. He married Kathleen Claire in 1932 and they had two sons.

Moving to Townsville to continue his legal work he entered Local Government and became an Alderman in the Townsville City Council. He was the first in Australia and remained in this position until 1944. The Communist Party had continued to grow rapidly in North Queensland. Paterson was at the forefront, playing a significant role in the union movement in the sugar industry during a key strike over workplace conditions, and became involved in the anti-fascist movement. It was in 1944 that he was elected to the Legislative Assembly as the State Member for Bowen. He was re-elected in 1947.

It was in 1948 however, when Paterson was in Brisbane during the railway strikes that he was struck over the head with a baton by a police officer. He was rushed to hospital unconscious, and his injuries were so severe he was unable to work for a number of months. Some say he was never the same again. He lost his seat in Bowen in the next election when the Menzies Government re-aligned the boundaries of the electorate. It was the end of his political career, but he continued to be involved in the Communist Party and the Union movement until his death in 1977.

Paterson died 1977 in New South Wales.

Service Record: [View digital copy \(naa.gov.au\)](https://naa.gov.au)

Paulette Flint, 2023