

Catherine Ritchie House – History 1937-2018

On 28th July 1937, Annie Sunderland Burwell registered her last will and testament, this did not include The Presbyterian Deaconesses of Victoria. But a few months later a codicil was written on 11 Nov 1937 – it was not registered with the supreme court until 25 March 1942, 2 months after her death on 23 January 1942.

In the codicil Miss Charlotte Hessey was granted lifelong residency in “Koala” cottage Upwey. Upon her death the land and cottage were to be conveyed to the Presbyterian Church of Victoria as a rest home for deaconesses. It has never been clear as to why Annie did this?

Miss Charlotte Hessey occupied “Koala” cottage until her death in 1950, at which time the Equity Trustees Company passed title of the property to the Presbyterian Church of Victoria.

Over the next few years the house was used for low income rental and eventually following legal advice in 1973 was sold on 14 July 1973 in order to buy a more suitable property for the intended purpose. It sold at auction for \$35,000, \$10,000 over the asking price.

Wise investment by the church grew the investment to 10 times the original sum over the next 18 years, meaning it had sufficient funds to purchase another property.

So, in August 1991, after inspecting over 20 houses on both the Bellarine and Mornington Peninsula's, 10 Glamis St Mt Martha was purchased and occupancy gained on 18 Dec 1991.

Alterations and improvements were made before the official opening on 22 Feb 1992 by the moderator, Rev John Billington. The property was named Catherine Ritchie House in recognition of the lifelong dedication to the church and deaconesses by the former Rolland House principal, who spoke at the opening.

Many ongoing modifications would be made over the years and a committee of management only had 3 chairpersons. The first year was Joan Mawhinney, Margaret Allan for 19 years and Helen Jackson for the last 6 years. They were supported by many deaconesses, deacons and their spouses who provided much volunteer labour to maintain the house and keep the costs down. For the first 21 years the booking officer was deaconess Val Schmidtke and for most of that time she was also the treasurer until she died in 17 Oct 2012.

The house and flat have been used by hundreds if not thousands of people over the 27 years, including deaconesses, deacons and their families. In recent years the house was being used less and less by the intended users and the committee struggled (due to several deaths) to enlist new members. My wife Carolyn Blakemore served as the booking officer for the last 5 years and I served as the treasurer for just over the last 6 years.

At a meeting on 7 Dec 2015 at which all deaconesses and deacons in the Vic/Tas Synod were invited, a decision was made to sell the house and use the funds to grant respite and short-term holidays to deaconesses and deacons.

The Synod property trust requested a supreme court Cy-Pres due to the bequest which was achieved by mid 2018. The property was placed on the market and sold in October 2018 with settlement being on 20 December 2018.

The Diaconate Association and the management committee which had been recognised and constituted by the Synod Standing Committee in early 2016, has now requested to be dissolved with the trust oversight to be passed to the Synods Pastoral Assistance Committee.

Rev Gavin Blakemore (Treasurer and Administrator) – 23/1/2019