



AIRLIE

Background

Airlie was built not as a Home for children but to be the administrative headquarters of the Burnside Presbyterian Orphan Homes.

The foundation stone was laid by Colonel James Burns on 18 October 1913. The architects were A L McCredie and Anderson. The building was initially known as the "Administrative Block" and included a hall, carpenters' and other workshops for the boys, Board and reception rooms, store rooms, a medical examination room and a residence for the Superintendent. It took Mr R Lightfoot fifteen months to build and was officially opened on 30 December 1914 by Sir Ronald Munro Ferguson (Governor General of Australia).

Airlie was deliberately built to impress. The Board lavished £5,017 on its construction when a new home for 30 children cost only £2,500. It was a showcase of the quality of housing and care the Board was providing.

The architect, Gregory Nolan, states:

"that the front façade features a well proportioned classical verandah of twin fine grained Tuscan columns supporting sandstone lintels and a hipped slate roof. The verandah is dominated by a central classical portico of sandstone Tuscan columns supporting a finely proportioned sandstone frieze and pediment capped by a slated gable. The southern elevation features an elegantly executed curved stone bay window, while the north includes a small verandah of regular Tuscan columns supporting a simple slated roof."

It is reported that the stone for the columns was extracted from the quarry at Gowan Brae, Sir James Burns' home.

1917 - 1941

In 1917 the main hall with its large curved ceiling was fitted up as a playschool for 40 or 50 children. (The playschool had previously been housed in the Blairgowrie Home).

With the opening of the Margaret Harris Hospital in December 1917 and Sargood Hall in August 1919 the functions of Airlie changed. Assemblies, meetings, Sunday School and daily prayers and general social activities moved from Airlie to the new venue whilst the medical examinations had moved across to the hospital. For some years the kindergarten was conducted in the new hall.

It would appear that by 1919, although it continued to house the library, board room and offices, Airlie functioned as a home for kindergarten children, both girls and boys.

On 5 September 1922 an administrative office was opened on the eastern side of Sargood Hall and Airlie was from then on to function essentially as one of the homes for many years. During the 1930s decade, when the population of the homes was at its height, Airlie was a boys' home.

War Years

From 1941 to 1944 the Burnside children were evacuated to homes in the Blue Mountains as an emergency measure and the homes were occupied by the Army. Airlie was occupied by the General Officer Commanding (usually called G.O.C.) and Brigadier General's staff.

1945 - Present

Following the return of the children and staff from their temporary homes in the Blue Mountains early in 1945, Airlie Home was used temporarily as a toddlers' centre. During the following year it was remodeled and opened as a Pre-school centre where the smaller children played and were instructed during the day. Two teachers were employed.

In 1949 the artist Pixie O'Harris painted murals on the walls of the main hall suitable to its new purpose as a kindergarten.

In 1970, with the decreasing number of children in residential care, the preschool was opened to take children from private homes in the vicinity for the daily program. Alterations were made to the building and additional

equipment was purchased to enable affiliation with the Kindergarten Union. By 1971 the capacity had increased from 20 to 40 children.

In 1973 the program was altered to a half day program for each child. This made the facilities available to 80 children. The following year records indicate that 75% of the children came from private homes.

In 1977 decreased government subsidies for the operation of the preschool made it impossible for Burnside to maintain and the Kindergarten Union agreed to operate the Kindergarten, Burnside providing the premises.

It has continued to operate as a kindergarten ever since.