

Entry type: Organisation
Entry ID: AWE0440

War Widows' Guild of Australia NSW Limited

(1946 -)

Born	19460619
Occupation	Community organisation

Summary

In June 1946, following the establishment of a War Widows' Craft Guild in Victoria, a Guild was formed in New South Wales.

The purpose of the Guild was to enable war widows in NSW to live their lives with dignity and support to meet their ongoing and emerging needs.

With the setting-up of the Guild, craft work got under way almost immediately, commencing with sock and glove-making classes. By November, the guild shop was opened in Rowe Street, to sell craft goods made by members and other saleable goods. Although Victoria was planning a guild shop, NSW was first to establish one. The NSW Guild closed its handicraft school in December 1951 and sold the equipment to members, but the shop was to remain open, a good money-spinner for the Guild, until September 1960. [1]

From 1953 to 1988, the Guild in NSW built 13 blocks of units at nine locations. After selling two housing properties, at the time of writing (April 2003) the Guild provides a total of 198 self-care, one-bedroom units of retirement housing in seven Sydney locations.

In 2002 and 2003, President Marie Beach and Chief Executive Officer Patricia Campbell represented The War Widows' Guild of NSW Inc. on the Women in War Project working group.

Details

On 4 June 1946 at a meeting held in the Conference Room of the Grand United Order of Oddfellows by the Women's Services, Jessie Vasey was a guest speaker. She spoke about the aims of the War Widows' Craft Guild and the setting-up of the craft classes. A decision was taken to form a New South Wales Guild. At a further meeting held on 19 June, a committee was established and 100 members enrolled. [2]

In 1951 Maylee Morrissey (Honorary secretary 1948-1961) and Jean Cunningham (President 1950-1952) visited the North Coast to establish sub-branches (later called Guild Clubs) for the Guild. The Clubs formed at Lismore and Newcastle still continue and are now (2003) over 51 years old.

The NSW Guild, while based on Victoria's framework and example, and though always completely supportive of national policy and prepared to battle for that policy, has always had some dissimilarities. [3] From the start their branch admitted to membership widows from both world wars as designated war widows by the Department of Veterans' Affairs, excepting those who have remarried. Allied Countries war widows are also eligible if they receive a war widows' pension from the country of origin. Finally, Defence Widows under the Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986 and Defence Widows compensated under the Safety Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988 are eligible for Guild Membership.

Since 1998 the Guild has been a company limited by guarantee, governed by a Board of Directors, two-thirds of whom are members, and subject to the regulations of the *Corporations Act 2001*. It provides a range of services to its members including advocacy, information, support, friendship and a telephone support line. It organises high profile events such as a large members' Christmas Party, a War Widows' Walk and a travelling exhibition; as well as publishing the *Guild Digest*, a quarterly magazine for members.

Each year a Memorial Service is held in St Andrew's Cathedral several days prior to Anzac Day, followed by Dedication of a Field of Remembrance and the planting of official crosses. The idea originated with Mrs C J Pope, who was impressed while visiting London by a Field of Remembrance held each year in the old churchyard of St Margaret's, alongside Westminster Abbey, and inaugurated by the Royal British Legion Poppy Factory Ltd, at which small wooden crosses are planted in memory of the fallen. Supported by voluntary labour of Guild members, Mrs Pope organised the Field each year until her death in 1963. [4] The Governor of NSW, who is also Patron of the Guild, plants the first cross, followed by representatives from the City of Sydney, the New Zealand Government, the three Armed Services and the War Widows' Guild. The Field is then open to other associated bodies and members of the public to plant small crosses. The Field remains open until sunset on Anzac Day.

In the year 2002 The Guild of NSW had over 14,300 members, with most being in their late 70s and 80s. The Guild now regards itself as a 'sunset organisation', which in 10-15 years will become a much smaller organisation with around 1,000-1,500 members.

[1] *No Mean Destiny* p. 60

[2] *ibid* p. 61

[3] *ibid* p. 66

[4] *ibid* p. 64

Published resources

Book

No mean destiny : the story of the War Widows' Guild of Australia 1945-85, Clark, Mavis Thorpe, 1986

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

Private hands (These records may not be readily available)

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Author Details

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