Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE0102

Schutt, Helen Macpherson

(1874 - 1951)

Born	18740417, Melrose Roxburghshire Scotland
Died	19510419, Cannes France
Occupation	Philanthropist

Summary

Helen Macpherson Schutt, who was charitable in life, bequeathed the majority of her considerable wealth to Victorian charities on her death in 1951. The Helen Macpherson Schutt Trust subsequently donated to hospitals, art galleries, museums, aged care homes, educational institutions and medical research bodies throughout Victoria, according to the stipulations of its benefactor. In 2001, the Trust marked the 50th year of its operation by publishing a brief biography of its benefactor, and by changing its name to the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust in order to honour her family, and recognise the origin of her wealth.

Details

Helen Macpherson Smith was the only child of Scottish-born Robert Smith, a timber merchant, and his wife, Australian-born Jane Priscilla (née Macpherson). Jane's father was also Scottish-born and had large landholdings in the Western District of Victoria. Both of Helen's parents were wealthy. The Smiths lived in Melbourne from the year of Helen's birth, residing at Fitzroy for seven years before travelling in Australia, Britain and Europe. Helen received part of her education at boarding schools in Scotland and Germany. On her return to Melbourne in 1889 she attended PLC for one year.

In 1901, Helen was married at Toorak Presbyterian Church to William John Schutt, a barrister who also played football for Essendon. Their home, a villa in Toorak, was a present from Helen's parents. In 1919 William became a Supreme Court judge. Helen was by this time a supporter of the Missions to Seamen; the Royal District Nursing Service; and the RSPCA. In 1923 the couple left Melbourne and sailed for London. Helen – due apparently to a fear of seasickness – never returned to Australia. Her husband returned to visit her regularly for ten years until he fell on board a ship leaving England and died from concussion of the brain in 1933. William was given a ship's burial in the Red Sea.

Robert Smith had died on June 17, 1904, and his wife Jane Priscilla on December 2, 1914. Most of the personal family estate was left to Helen. Little is known about her life abroad. She was secure financially and divided her time between Switzerland and the south of France. She stayed in touch with people at home with the occasional postcard, and paid the school feels of some younger family members. She spent her later years at the Hotel Majestic in Cannes, France, and died from pneumonia at the age of 77, but on her death was buried in a pauper's grave at Marseilles with her name spelt incorrectly in the local register. Many years later her body was exhumed and her remains cremated.

Helen's estate was valued at £406,121. Of this she left £275,000 to establish a charitable trust for the benefit of Victorians. Named the Helen M. Schutt Trust, it became the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust in 2001 to better reflect the origins of the wealth behind it. In her will, Helen stipulated that her Trustees consider some of her favoured organisations but gave them wide discretionary powers for investment and distribution of income. The Helen Macpherson Smith Trust continues today with a capital of over $78 million. Its policy is to make grants in the fields of education, public health, medical research, general cultural activities and social welfare – particularly for disabled and aged persons. In recent years the Trust provided funding for the Melbourne Genealogy Centre, housed within the State Library of Victoria.

Published resources

Article
The Invisible Samaritan: Helen M Schutt, Sandilands, Jane,
http://www.netspace.net.au/~hshassoc/helessch.html

Book
Helen Macpherson Schutt, Sandilands, Jane, 2001

Resource Section
Schutt, Helen Macpherson (1874-1951), Sandilands, Jane, 2006,
http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/AS10429b.htm

Newspaper Article
Memorial to Helen Macpherson Schutt, 2002

Thesis
In Her Gift: Activism and Altruism in Australian Women's Philanthropy, 1880-2005, Lemon, Barbara, 2008

Site Exhibition
In Her Gift: Women Philanthropists in Australian History, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2009,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/wiph/home.html

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

Helen Macpherson Smith Trust
Helen Macpherson Schutt

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