



## The Rehoboth Story

### Early Years

Back in 1974 there was a desire by a number of folk who were members of Malpas Road Evangelical Church to provide accommodation for retired missionaries.

To quote one of the Trustees *"It all began when I was aware of a need of the Rev and Mrs David Davies, missionaries returning from China to settle back into this country of Wales for their retirement. They needed accommodation. God was working in a couple of people's hearts about this need and a group of people who had this shared vision to help retired missionaries began to meet and the start of this story begins"*.

In the meantime another group of people in the Cardiff area were also aware of the need of the Rev and Mrs David Davies and in due course suitable accommodation was found for them.

Mrs Davies needed residential care after Mr Davies's death and the vision of Rehoboth was enlarged to provide for the elderly as well as retired missionaries.

For many years the small group of men and women met on a regular basis to pray for God's leading and a fund was set up where small contributions were made on a regular basis. By the start of 1984, just under £1,400 had accumulated.

The sort of thing that was prayed for was that a property, near the church, would come onto the market and this could be purchased by Rehoboth to provide the required accommodation for retired missionaries/elderly in need.

The name Rehoboth is found in the Bible (Genesis 26v22) where we read 'He (Isaac) named it Rehoboth, saying, Now the LORD has given us room .....

Months even years passed but no such property became available, however, the meetings continued and prayer also continued.

The Pastor of the church at that time was Hugh Morgan and he mentioned to the group that a person in the church, who wanted to remain anonymous, wished to set up a home in Newport for elderly Christians who were unable to care for themselves.

Prayer was answered during 1984 in such an exciting way – again to quote one of the Trustees

*"One day Mr Morgan was in town, it was a Monday and he met a lady called Mary Samson who had just started to come to our church. They talked and she said 'tell me Mr Morgan, what do you do for the elderly in your church?' Mr Morgan began to answer the general things going on at church, and she asked the question again 'what do you do for the elderly?', - Mr Morgan told her about the meeting called, Sisterhood, but this answer obviously wasn't satisfying her, and he went on to tell her about the group at church with a vision to buy a home for elderly Christians when they can no longer look after themselves. Before she left him she said 'I will give them £40,000'. He rang me and asked if I was sitting down and he told me the story we've just related. I couldn't believe it; I said '£40,000 I'll be able to skip into the estate agent!' But wait, he said, that's not all, before I got home she had called the house and said she would make it £100,000. I was speechless and my legs felt like lead, I said I can't believe it. He said 'you're on your way now'. It was a real confirmation, it was such an answer to prayer and we knew for sure this was the way forward. We held a meeting and there was great rejoicing and excitement by the group for this confirmation of the vision"*

Although at the time this was not precisely the vision of the Rehoboth group, it was felt that we should prayerfully explore the way forward with this person, through the good offices of Hugh Morgan, acting as an intermediary

This person had sufficient funds to purchase a property but wished to remain anonymous, with only Hugh Morgan knowing the true identity of the benefactor. The person unknown to the group at that time became affectionately known as 'Benny'

Then started the long drawn out process of house hunting which meant looking for a large house in Newport, centrally located, with potential to be altered/extended making it suitable for a residential home accommodating 10 to 12 elderly people

The process involved contacting local estate agents and a number of the Rehoboth Group viewing suitable properties with potential to extend etc. The process was further complicated by keeping 'Benny' informed (still unknown to the group) who also wanted to view any potential properties to give approval

After a considerable time viewing properties all over Newport a large house came onto the market in Stow Park Circle which had outline planning permission for change of use from a private dwelling to a residential home and an asking price of £125,000. Could this property be the one?

A number of Trustees visited the house and on entering the Dining Room above the mantelpiece there was a scripture 'Christ is the head of this house'

The Rehoboth Group was thrilled with the property and its potential and quickly passed on the details to our benefactor who was also very pleased with the property and provided the full purchase price including costs.

The identity of the benefactor was made known to the group and to our great surprise it was a lady (for some reason we had assumed the benefactor to be a man), Miss Mary Samson, who attended Malpas Road Evangelical Church. Mary was a retired schoolteacher and a keen Christian. Her father had been a successful art collector and Mary had inherited a considerable amount of money from him.

### **Moving On**

Mary provided the money to purchase 21 Stow Park Circle which was bought in January 1986 and we praise God for his goodness and putting the desire into Mary's heart of making provision for the elderly Christians of Newport unable to care for themselves.

An added bonus with the purchase of 21 Stow Park Circle was a flat on the second floor, which could not be used as part of the residential home, but was used for missionaries, ministers and others in need of temporary accommodation.

The purchase of the house was just the beginning. The Trustees were meeting regularly and a management committee was formed to move on the alterations of the house to convert it to a residential home to accommodate 12 people and to obtain all the necessary approvals and registration with the local authority.

To assist with the security of the Home prior to opening a number of the Trustees took it in turns to sleep at the Home over-night and then go to work as usual, so that it looked as though somebody was living there.

We thank God for Mary who loaned the Trust £100,000 to carry out these alterations (subsequently given to the Trust in Mary's will).

The alteration work was completed in 1988 and although Mary did not enjoy the best of health she was able to attend the official opening of Rehoboth Christian Residential Home for the Elderly. In fact, Registration of the Home, by the Local Authority, was obtained on 17<sup>th</sup> June 1988 and Mary opened the Home by cutting the ribbon on 12<sup>th</sup> November 1988 when Hugh Morgan preached and the hymns 'Great God of Wonders' and 'Great is Thy Faithfulness' were sung.

It was with great sadness that we heard of the death of Mary Samson on 16<sup>th</sup> November 1988 so soon after the official opening of the Home. We praise God for the life of Mary Samson. It's so amazing that in addition to all that Mary had done for Rehoboth she made the Home (with other causes) a residuary beneficiary of her estate and there is more to say about that later.

Further developments at the Home included a substantial single and two-storey extension to provide additional accommodation and increase resident numbers to 20. Ten single en-suite bedrooms were added by December 1989. This extension was opened by the Rev Hugh Morgan on 7<sup>th</sup> July 1990 and was named the Mary Samson Wing.

The finance for this scheme, in the order of £270,000, was provided by our bankers by way of a loan. Again, God's hand was in this part. Approaching the Bank Manager for the loan, the main question he asked was about the business plan and the way the loan would be repaid. The Treasurer's response was that God would provide as he had been doing since the start of the Home. Normal terms for such a load was a period of 10 years and the Treasurer assured the Bank Manager that God would provide the funds over that period. The loan was indeed paid off in full within the 10 years which was due partly to the fact that Mary Samson had made the Home a residuary beneficiary, which meant that further substantial monies came from her estate long after her death.

The South Wales Argus ran an article about Rehoboth, under the heading "The impossible dream that really came true". The reporter briefly outlined the story of the setting up of the Home with pictures of some of the early residents and staff a number of which were members of Malpas Road Evangelical Church.

There was a full day's routine for the residents beginning with a cup of tea in bed at 7 a.m. followed by breakfast also in bed at 8 a.m. Daily services were held at 11.30 a.m. led by the staff. Friday services were led by a Minister/Lay preacher. Communion services were held every 6 weeks. Following lunch and afternoon tea, evening meals were provided at 5.30 p.m. During the evening there was a short service or a Malpas Road Sunday service tape. Once a fortnight Bible studies were led by Mrs Mari Morgan. If residents so wished a car was available to take them to the Sunday evening service at Malpas Road. A group from Pontrhydyrun Baptist Church visited monthly to lead a service.

From time to time other activities took place e.g. craft afternoons, concerts by two Salvation Army groups, Young People's Fellowship visits, video nights and slide shows and Christmas carol groups. Four members of the National Orchestra of Wales came to play a medley of Christmas music and carols and "Rehoboth Productions" put on its second pantomime entitled 'A Christmas Carol'.

One of the highlights of the year at Rehoboth was the annual Open Day usually held in June or July and other events included visiting groups of entertainers, light physical exercises, coffee mornings, choirs, trips to the seaside, in particular Penarth for ice cream, trips to the pantomime, VE celebrations, visits to Tintern, Guy Fawkes party, Easter eggs, Christmas Fayre etc .

An article appeared in The Evangelical Magazine of Wales in 1999 entitled "Caring for the elderly (one possibility)". The article was written by the late Glyn Baker who was a Trustee of Rehoboth and it seemed fitting to quote a part of what he said, *"Rehoboth has a Christian ethic and the Trustees hold to a firmly evangelical doctrinal basis. The evangelistic opportunities provided by such a home are also considerable. The love and care shown and the overtly Christian atmosphere all combine as an effective witness to unbelieving children and, indeed, to some unconverted residents and, not insignificantly, to local authority employees who make frequent inspections of the Home. Such evangelistic opportunities, though welcomed are not the raison d'être for the Home. Its purpose is to provide the kind of 'no strings attached' care given by any Christian family to its older members"*.

The work of the 'Friends of Rehoboth' was a great help to the Home both from a financial standpoint and practical help during the whole of the time the Home was in existence. In addition many gifts were received from individuals, organisations and legacies.

In order that the Home was viable it was important that maximum occupancy was maintained at all times or at least something like 90% occupancy. This was not always possible and it was a constant concern of the manager and Trustees.

The ethos of the Home was Christian and whilst it was not always possible to employ all Christian staff it was important that the manager was a Christian. The Home has been blessed with fine Christian ladies as managers from the very beginning of the work and we thank God for providing such committed ladies. The first manager was Miss Ann Akrill followed by Mrs Susan Williams, Mrs Helen Hughes and Mrs Karen Marchant (acting manager).

It was becoming more and more difficult to recruit Christian ladies to manage the Home, 'red tape' was also making things very difficult in running the Home and there was always a fine balance in setting economical charges to maintain the viability of the Home. Further, maintaining the fabric of the building in good order was also a constant concern.

Changes in social care meant that more and more people would be cared for in their own homes and it was becoming more and more evident that we were not meeting the objects of our Trust Deed, one of which stated that the Home should provide 'for people who are Christians in necessitous circumstances': fewer and fewer of the residents coming into the Home were Christians as many were being referred from Social Services.

Things were brought to a head during 2007/08 when the Trustees began asking the unthinkable questions regarding the future of Rehoboth Christian Residential Home. Reserve funds were falling rapidly and it was thought the home would go into deficit during 2008. There were many heart-searching Trustees' meetings when the future of the Home was prayerfully considered. How could we contemplate closing the Home with many long term residents and also many long term staff?

After much soul-searching and prayer the Trustees decided to seek to sell the Home as a going concern which would mean that the residents and staff positions were protected, although there was no way of guaranteeing this.

The decision was thus taken to close the Home and this was the announcement made to employees and resident's families in March 2008. The relatives were so upset by the news that the Trustees agreed to explore options for selling the home in the following two weeks and a subsequent meeting with relatives was set for two weeks later. During these two weeks a number of potential buyers were identified (i.e. companies/individuals known to already own and run similar homes) and approached. On the Friday before the second meeting with relatives (on the Saturday) a buyer was found, who had money in the bank ready for just such a purchase, so the Trustees were able to announce that the Home would be able to remain open under new management – everyone was thrilled.

This was a real answer to prayer in that the Home would continue to be run as a residential home (although not with a Christian ethos). The residents could remain (although a few made alternative arrangements) and the staff could continue in their jobs if they so wished. The new owners changed the name of the Home to Willow House Care Home.

### **Future Directions of The Rehoboth Trust**

The Rehoboth Trust, which was responsible for Rehoboth Christian Residential Home, continues to function but with slightly different objects. These revised objects took two years of negotiations with solicitors and the Charity Commissioners but were finally approved.

The Rehoboth Trust continues to be a registered charity with a Christian ethos run entirely by volunteers. It is now a grant making body the objects of which are:

- a) The advancement of the Christian religion (same object as before)
- b) The relief of financial hardship, sickness or old age of people who are Christians or have dedicated their life to Christianity through missionary work in particular by the provision of financial assistance or accommodation (revised object)

Application for a grant may be made to the Treasurer of The Rehoboth Trust, Ed Swires-Hennessy, 9 Arlington Close, Newport, South Wales, NP20 6QF (Tel: 01633 854625 - Email: [Rehobothtrust@ntlworld.com](mailto:Rehobothtrust@ntlworld.com))