

Glebe's Old Fire Station 1975 - 2018

a community centre with a difference.¹

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Many people who live in Glebe are familiar with the Old Fire Station (OFS) at 113 Mitchell Street. Its late Victorian architecture makes it a distinctive and well known addition to the heritage streetscapes that characterise Glebe, our 19th century suburb.

However its appearance is only one important aspect of this building and its situation; perhaps more importantly is its function as a *de facto* community centre. Unlike other community centres it was not built by nor is it funded through the local government purse, as many are. The following article investigates the role the Old Fire Station has played as a community centre in Glebe since the mid-1970s². It remains a place of considerable importance to Glebe residents today.

Ownership of the OFS

Following the sale of the whole of the Glebe Estate by the Church of England to the Federal Government for \$17.5 million, effected in 1974³, the OFS was used, after some upgrading, as the Project Office for the Estate's redevelopment by the Department of Urban and Regional Development. Tom Uren, the Minister for Urban and Regional Development in the Whitlam Government is understood to have researched overseas examples of urban rehabilitation and refurbishment prior to the Labor Party coming into Government. His understanding of and interest in the retention of heritage buildings being renovated and repurposed extended to both Glebe and Woolloomooloo. Both suburbs owe him a debt of gratitude for his foresight and leadership; a leadership that realized the transition at a more economical cost than total demolition and rebuilding could while retaining the area's character.

The Project Office was housed in the OFS premises from 1975 to March 1976 after which it was transferred to Fascination House (115 Glebe Point Road).^{4 5 6} At that time it was stated that "The

¹ The overview article on the Old Fire Station published in *The Bulletin*, this web article and its companion, 'Glebe's Old Fire Station Site 1875-1974: the buildings and their uses' <https://www.glebesociety.org.au/ofs-1875-1975/>, are the result of a collaborative project undertaken by members of the Community Development Sub-Committee, Janice Challinor, Diane Hutchinson and Jan Macindoe. Each member had input across the project. The named author for each article is the person with primary responsibility for that article.

² The OFS appears to have fulfilled some community functions prior to the 1970's. An item published in *The Sun* (Sydney, NSW : 1910 - 1954). Fri 4, Dec 1925, Page 7, Advertising declares it as a polling booth for Council Elections. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/>

³ *Glebe Lands (Appropriation) Act 1974* (Cth) C2004A00094 Act No. 35 of 1974. Assented to 06/08/1974. No longer in force.

⁴ Bulletin 11, Glebe Project Newsletter.

⁵ Commercial building "Fascination House" including interior.115 Glebe Point Road. Lots 1-2, DP 246373. Local significance. Item No. I714. 2012 No 628 Sydney Local Environmental Plan 2012 Schedule 5 Environmental heritage.

⁶ Curiously enough, Fascination House itself proved some ongoing interest and amusement to attendees at the Have-a-chat café, the main occupant of the OFS, for a while some years later. The building was sold to a private owner when no longer required at the conclusion of the Glebe Project, and for a time occupied by several small retail businesses. Then the ground

premises at Mitchell St will be used for Residents' Meetings and Displays of Project Proposals, Plans, etc" (Bulletin 11).

OFS Community Services and Activities

By October 1976, the OFS was being used to provide a number of activities to members of the local community. The Glebe Project's Bulletin 13 included notices about Glebe Estate Women's Group activities in October '76, specifically 'Housie' and afternoon tea for older people, and child minding/playgroups taking place in the Old Fire Station. These were arranged by the Glebe Estate Women's Group which wanted group activities to be provided on the Estate.

A 1980 Glebe Project report notes that "A building, formerly the Glebe Fire Station, and adjacent to the Project Office has been made available through the Project Office for all sorts of community activities. It is also used for discussion sessions with visiting school groups, who come in regularly to inspect the Estate as part of social studies or history courses." ⁷

The Project Office and the Outreach Project of the NSW Department of Technical and Further Education also jointly sponsored a project which investigated and celebrated the traditional background of the area and its continuity. It did this by running a series of local history workshops inviting local people to discuss their memories of life in Glebe in the 1920's and 1930's. These were very successful with topics ranging from fashions of the day, attitudes to work, leisure activities and the previous uses of old buildings of the area "including the hall in which the meetings were held"⁸.

The NSW Department of Housing appears to have been somewhat uncertain about the importance of the Old Fire Station as a burgeoning community centre. A Housing Commission Report published after the NSW Department of Housing took over the Glebe Estate in 1985 stated -

"The Commonwealth Government established a community room in the old fire station in Mitchell Street adjoining the Estate Office, however its use was largely restricted to one local resident group known as The Residents Advisory Committee."⁹

A well-known Glebe identity of over 65 years, Sadie King¹⁰ reported that she was a member of the Advisory Committee from its inception, and recalled meeting in the OFS premises.

floor premises stood empty for many years; indeed they still are. However the upstairs apartments were utilized as backpacker accommodation for a time during the 2000's. Pastor Julie Brackenreg recalled that on several occasions clients at Have-a-chat café were privy to unobscured views of totally naked occupants of said backpackers climbing onto and sun bathing in full view on the flat roof at the rear of the building.

⁷ P 131. The Community and its Participation, Glebe Project (1980).

⁸ Ibid P.131.

⁹ P.28. 'Strategy Plan Report', NSW Housing Commission, 1985.

¹⁰ All first-hand anecdotal material is derived from interviews undertaken by J.Challinor, TGSI Community Committee Convenor, with local residents and community workers from December 2017 through to March 2018.

The 1985 NSW report is contrary to the claim found in the Glebe Project report of 1980 that it was being used by several local groups prior to the transfer of ownership from the Commonwealth to the State Government, however this publication goes on to note that

“Since taking over the Estate the [NSW Housing] Commission has made the community room available to a number of other local groups and has undertaken some upgrading work on the building. Full rehabilitation of the premises, incorporating access for disabled persons, will be undertaken this financial year.”¹¹

Another long-term resident of Glebe, Gaylene Harkin, who moved to Glebe from Millers Point in 1990 when her Housing Commission property lease there was not renewed, recalled that the upgrade project hadn't taken place when she arrived in Glebe. Her recollection of the OFS building at that time was one of a building suffering from serious dilapidation and lack of maintenance.

It seems that NSW Housing Commission may have planned to sell the OFS and the neighbouring building, 'Fascination House' located at 115 Glebe Point Road at that time. Gaylene recalled seeing 'For Sale' signs on the properties and attending public meetings to protest the sale of the OFS. The media was invited to attend, and a meeting with a NSW Housing Liaison officer, Ms Miller was arranged to ask local people why the OFS was needed. The response was unanimous; 'as a community centre' providing a safe community place. NSW Housing required some evidence of intended usage so a group of volunteers, using paint provided by the Housing Department painted the exterior in Heritage colours to demonstrate their commitment to the retention of the building as a community space.

Gaylene reported that a working committee of local residents together with people doing community service then commenced, with the permission, support and funding from the NSW Housing Commission to rehabilitate the old building. The necessity to do so became more urgent she recalled, when a piano which stood on a small platform at the northern wall of the hall collapsed through the floor. It took considerable effort to remove it, she said. The original stone floor of the building was built over with new joists and bearers to facilitate the installation of a new floor and ramp to allow ready access by people with physical disabilities. Gaylene¹² recalled other improvements including the installation of a kitchen and internal toilet facilities.

Following the death, shortly afterwards, of the elderly lady tenant who occupied the very small terrace that shared a common wall on the western side of the OFS premises, the Commission renovated that property too. They removed its bathroom and toilet and opened an internal door into the main hall of the OFS. The ground floor rooms subsequently became the venue for Housing personnel to regularly meet tenants who had concerns, requests and grievances to air. It continues to be used for this purpose

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Gaylene Harkin received a Certificate of Entry in the Australasian Housing Institute's inaugural Professional Excellence in Social Housing Awards, 2004. It was in the category 'Outstanding Contribution to a Resident Led Initiative'. Although the entry did not win it she received a letter from John Crickmore, Executive Director of AHI stating "*The judges commented favourably about your entry, and certainly had a difficult time separating the entrants. ... In recognition of your entry we enclose a Certificate of Entry ..to recognize that your work and achievements in social housing were worthy of consideration for the Awards*".

today. The rear yard of the small premise was also made accessible from the main hall by the addition of a glass door, while the construction of a brick planter box in the courtyard by volunteers delineated the space, separating it from the, by then, privately owned premises of 115 Glebe Point Road, aka Fascination House.

Following its reopening, use of the OFS was offered to all community groups in the neighbourhood. Some groups who accepted the offer included Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Aboriginal Mums and Bubs, Middle Aged Dames (MAD) and Pine Street studio which ran art classes.

Local residents who have been interviewed about their recollections of the functions that the Old Fire Station has fulfilled since it became a community centre have reported meetings of the Concerned Older Women's Group, Glebe Area Tenants group, the Forest Lodge and Glebe Coordination Group (FLAG), the Neighbourhood Advisory Board (NAB), the Glebe Society Management Committee¹³, the Eastern Precinct's Residents Group, the regular Bingo/ Housie games¹⁴, play groups and mother's groups. Additionally two different men's groups, the Glebe Bytes group, 'Hands Off Glebe' as well as private functions¹⁵ have utilized the space at various times.

One of the additions to the OFS after its reopening was a barbeque. It was installed in the courtyard and utilized by the Hope Street management to host a regular Tuesday lunch with sausage sandwiches provided at \$1 each. This was a very popular event, however a few weeks after it began the barbeque itself was spirited out of the building at night. While the community had its suspicions as to its whereabouts it was not returned, so another active community member, Kerry Bartholomew, a third generation Glebe family member went to the management of Mirvac at the Broadway Shopping Centre to ask for assistance. Mirvac very generously donated a replacement unit which was securely bolted in place to prevent further difficulties. This support for the community by a corporate neighbor was accepted with considerable gratitude.

Maree White, a Glebe resident who grew up in Mt Vernon Street and has lived in Mitchell Street for the past 35 years has been a member of the Glebe Area Tenants Group for 25 years. She said that over that time they've always met at the OFS. She has also been a member of the Glebe Neighbourhood Advisory Board (NAB) since its inception 2-3 years ago, and reported it also meets monthly at OFS.

In 2004 the then NSW Department of Housing completed significant alterations to the building including renovations to the kitchen and internal changes to enable the Glebe Computer Project to run in the side room. These were made to accommodate the expanding services being offered there. They reassigned one of their Client Service Officers (Camilla Baker) as a Project Officer. She was active in supporting social housing tenant groups in both practical and strategic ways. Hope Street¹⁶ established the Have-a-

¹³ The Glebe Society Inc moved its Management Committee Meetings to the Glebe Town Hall, following its refurbishment by the City of Sydney c. 2012/13.

¹⁴ The regular weekly Bingo Game now takes place at the St Helens Community Centre at 174 Glebe Point Road. After more than 40 years at the OFS it moved to 184 Glebe Point Road in the early 2000's.

¹⁵ A Glebe resident reported to Annie Atkins that her 21st birthday celebrations were held at the OFS in 1960's, which suggests that the premises were available for public hire after their commercial warehouse function ceased, but prior to the 1974 purchase of the Glebe Estate by the Federal Government.

¹⁶ Hope Street itself began in 1984 as an outreach project of the Baptist Inner City Ministries. Further detail will follow.

Chat-café¹⁷ and in 2004 the Glebe Community Development Project (GCDP) was established, providing on-going support for the community.

The Glebe Computer Project, a community-driven initiative commenced in 2004. It was in response to growing community needs for access to the internet and to IT education. Computers for the project were donated by the City of Sydney, however they remained in storage at the Glebe Town hall until a room was provided for their installation at the OFS. Another difficulty in bringing that project into existence was the provision of a telephone line for modem connection to the Internet. The OFS did not have a Telstra account so the installation of the landline was initially done in the name of Gaylene Harkin, one of the community activists who pursued this development. A separate room on the south-eastern corner of the OFS building was designated as the Computer room. It has the added advantage of access through the Campbell Lane doorway, without imposing upon activities occurring in the main hall of the centre. The internal door to the main hall was also closed over by furniture placement to separate the two spaces for independent usage. The Glebe Community Development Project, commenced in 2004¹⁸ has been particularly supportive of this project; one that is necessary to encourage computer literacy, and allow internet access to local residents who may otherwise be unable to afford access to this important communications medium. Volunteers from within the community of whom Barbara Ratcliffe is one, regularly guide and assist people using the computers. The necessity for computer literacy is now essential for Estate tenants as so much information from and management by FACS is communicated to clients on-line.

The Concerned Older Women's group was established in May 2005 when eight women, meeting at the OFS began discussing problems they'd all encountered in the local area. Marie Roberts reported that they decided to form a community group with the specific intention of requesting relevant authorities to address their concerns¹⁹. This followed from a community survey of older people by public housing authorities reported in November 2004. Some of the issues they pursued were the provision of street furniture, in particular seating at several points along Glebe Point Road; improvement in Glebe street lighting in several areas where there was insufficient for safety; and the rerouting of the 370 bus to its former route, from City Road down Carillon Avenue to Missenden Road before rejoining King Street, in order to make Royal Prince Alfred Hospital and other nearby medical services more accessible to those who were less ambulatory but needed to depend on public transport. There were many others too and although not all of these campaigns were successfully concluded, quite a few were.

The group gradually gained more members and began holding talks with guest speakers. These included people such as Eva Cox, feminist and UTS lecturer, Jenny Underwood from City of Sydney Council, Jacqueline Cosgrove, independent film maker, Sandra Nori, then Member for Port Jackson, and Robyn Kemmis, Deputy Lord mayor of Sydney. They also started Crafty Women, an offshoot which creates

¹⁷ The Have-a-Chat-café continues to operate three days per week, on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. It provides an important venue for local people to socialize, but also hosts other activities such as Crafty Women and art classes as well as the distribution of donated foodstuffs.

¹⁸ P5. Glebe Community Development Evaluation. September 2009. Frazer Howard and Partners Evaluation Report.

¹⁹ Confirmed by Marla Priest, another of the founding members and included in their history booklet. Other founding members were Irene Moore, Lee Webster, Gwen Woods and Janet Quigley-Sharpe.

craftwork, and collected and published a cook book²⁰, both of which are sold to raise funds for local causes. Further publications followed such as 'Stories of Glebe Women - Past and Present'²¹ and 'Concerned Older Women – A History. Glebe 2005 – 2014.'²² In this last publication a member of COW, Gillian Ellis stated -

“It is great that the Old Fire Station exists for various types of persons, so many classes, languages, arts and crafts going on “.

Clearly, the OFS and all that is provided there is indeed valued.

The Glebe Community Development Project produced a regular newsletter which amongst other things, informed residents of the activities taking place at OFS. From 2006 through to 2008 additional activities were also advertised. They mainly included Hope Street Church Services, MAD (Middle aged dames) meetings, regular art classes, Bible classes, drama workshops, Friday Forums (discussion groups including Living Storybook), movie afternoons, Wheelie Warriors men’s group, Homework Helpers Club, free bread²³ on Fridays, and the Mitchell Street Fete which commenced in 2006. During this time the Glebe Area Tenants group celebrated its 18th birthday in 2006, having been meeting at OFS continuously since 1988.

Most of these services have continued to run at OFS. The art workshops run by personnel from Pine Street Studios at Chippendale with funding from the City of Sydney continues on Fridays. Other Friday activities include the free bread distribution and story-telling sessions. The Glebe Area Tenants group has organized Good Friday fish lunches there, eg. in March 2008 and Crafty Women, an offshoot of C.O.W.s also meet on Fridays. Meanwhile the Glebe Computer project, rebadged as Glebe Bytes and extended through City of Sydney funding for upgrades in 2009 through a GCDP project reopened. With the support of Department of Housing, TAFE Outreach, Salvation Army, Glebe Community Op Shop, GCDP and the City Of Sydney it continues to operate at the OFS premises several times a week. The GCDP now manage Have-a-chat Café, and has partnered with Legal Aid NSW and Redfern Legal Centre to provide a weekly free legal advice service for those in need. Oz Harvest makes a weekly delivery of redistributed fresh food for café clients.

For many years Wednesday was movie afternoon at OFS, an initiative started by Leigh Webster, a gifted pianist and entertainer who lived on the Estate. She had a large personal collection of movies which she was happy to share with the community. Wednesday morning was also Bingo morning run by Marie Roberts. She took over from the original coordinators Grace Martin and Marion Stanwell who’d started Bingo, or Housie as it was then known, in the mid-seventies with funding from the Glebe Project. Bingo was probably the earliest community activity, after the Residents Advisory Board to utilize the OFS

²⁰ Glebe Community Cook Book, Pub. Hope Street Urban Compassion 2008 Glebe Community Church. Printed Aviweb Printing Pty Ltd, Naremburn. 2065

²¹ 11 Dec 2009. Self-published.

²² Self-published 2014.

²³ Provided by Bakers’ Delight, Glebe.

premises. Housing NSW continued to support the activity by providing funds for prizes. Julie Brackenreg recalled Housing employee Donna Rose, with whom she regularly liaised, taking Marie Roberts shopping for the prizes. Prizes usually consisted of more expensive pantry goods such as tinned ham and expensive biscuits, all desirable to participants with limited financial resources. Marie, who grew up in Glebe, ran Bingo at the OFS for many years. Bingo was moved to St Helens Community Centre in Glebe Point Road when it opened as a community centre in 2000. It is run by Cathy Hutchinson.

With so many regular activities and services taking place there the OFS quickly became the local community's venue of choice for important events. Memorial Services have been held there for past residents of the Estate whose funerals were held away from Glebe. Many celebrations such as Birthdays have also been held there. One took place in January this year (2018) when a former resident who grew up in Glebe but now resides in a disability care facility in the Southern Suburbs turned 40. A highlight of this was that one of her former teachers at Glebe Public School and life-long resident of Glebe, Kay White, was able to be in attendance.

Coordination and Support for OFS Activities and Services

Most users of OFS are classed as community facilities and are not charged a rental. One such service was Hope Street and its main community building activity, 'Have-a-chat café' The majority of other users are similarly classified. Julie Brackenreg, a former minister in Glebe recalled a great deal of the history of this service in Glebe.

In 1992/3 John Connan was called to Glebe to succeed the Curtises where his wife Joy joined him in the work. Their first social work involved initiating a food and vegetable run; collecting food where there was surplus available before it spoiled and redistributing it to local people on the Estate. This was a considerable time before the advent of Oz Harvest.

Through her background at Hope Street in Woolloomooloo Joy realized that the female children of Glebe, especially those living in the Estate, were generally without future prospects. She feared that many would, in all probability, become clients of the Women's Space in Woolloomooloo unless alternative opportunities and pathways were opened up for them. Consequently with husband John's support they requested and gained permission of the Baptist administration to commence a branch of the Girls Brigade in Glebe in 1993. That was when Julie Brackenreg first came to work in Glebe, where she and her then 16 year old daughter ran the Brigade from then until 2005, over which time numbers averaged about 25 per annum.

Most of the children who attended ranged from Year 1 to Year 6 students at the local primary school, but on occasions toddlers were sent by exasperated mothers needing time for themselves, while some girls continued to attend after moving on to high school. As a former school teacher, Julie had already been engaged in creating programs for the Brigade, based on the four square principles of social, emotional, spiritual and educational support. Organised activities such as craft, camping, and bible studies took place, usually at the OFS and through these Julie recalled meeting Turkish Moslem families living on the Estate whose daughters joined the Brigade. Julie advised them about the religious nature of some activities but these parents took the ecumenical view that as Jesus was also a prophet in Islam it was fine for their girls to attend. One particular family with whom Julie became acquainted at that time was that of Heather and Laurie Murphy who led the Christian Life Church, attached to the Assemblies of

God, which met at the Glebe Public School. Their daughters joined the Brigade and this relationship became important to the continuity of the 'Have-chat café' after Hope Street was defunded by the Baptist Church administration in 2012.

Initially Hope Street operated out of the Uniting Church premises in St John's Road. The Uniting Church had commenced its Café Church as an alternative to traditional church service models to adapt to the changing social mix in Glebe some years earlier, however its activities in Glebe were winding down as the size of the congregation shrank. Consequently having worked with the Baptist ministers, sharing worship space in the St Johns Road premises, they offered to give the use of the upstairs office space to Hope Street, free of rental charge and with the additional provision of electricity and phone at no cost. The Baptists remained there for 19 years, holding church services there until 2007 when they moved them to the OFS. The arrangement struck between the two denominations suited both groups, so in return Hope Street took over the management of the formerly Uniting Church run Glebe Community Op Shop in Glebe Street. In July 2004 the Hope Street Minister John Coleman began the 'Have-chat café' at the OFS where Julie Brackenreg volunteered in 2004 and 2005. In 2006 when Julie became the pastor at Glebe the number of days operation of the 'Have-chat café' was extended from 2 to 3; being Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. It remained thus until Hope Street discontinued its Glebe ministry; a situation which was distressing for the community. The justification was based on diminishing numbers attending services which averaged between 12 and 20 on Sundays, however Julie maintained that due to the outreach nature of their work somewhere in the order of 400 people on the Estate would have named her as their pastor at that stage, had they been asked.

As a response to the defunding of Hope Street the local congregation together with wider community members met under Julie's leadership and formed 'The Heart of Glebe'. It was registered as a charity in 2012, and with financial support from various donors and some funding organized by the local Member of State Parliament Jamie Parker. It ran for another two years. Heart of Glebe took over and continued the work of Hope Street at the OFS. During this time Julie worked without salary while funding received was sufficient to support a part time worker who upon Julie's retirement became full-time.

Unfortunately the transition was unsuccessful due to personal difficulties, and the entity ceased to function. Management of the Glebe Community Op Shop was taken over by Heather Murphy of Glebe Christian Life Church, and Have-a-chat Café was managed by the Glebe Community Development Project with funds organized by the late Cr Robyn Kemmis, from the City of Sydney for the GCDP to employ a worker for the café for an initial three months. Funding to keep Have-a-chat operating has been an ongoing struggle with the GCDP providing staff for two days per week in 2017, with local volunteer and husband of Heather Murphy, Laurie running 'Have-chat café' a third day per week. Social Work students of the Glebe Community Development Project under the management of Ally de Pree provide a significant additional resource to the café while learning valuable community and social work skills. At the time of writing (May 2018) 'Have-chat café' continues to operate three days per week with limited funding from GCDP and due to the extraordinary voluntary efforts of Laurie Murphy and now also Julie Brackenreg. She has continued her association with Glebe through unpaid community support such as hospital visits and counselling, and is now devoting her Friday's to running 'Have-chat café' again on a voluntary basis.

It is noteworthy that there has been a considerable amount of inter-denominational cooperation amongst the Glebe churches. Minister, pastors and priests meet regularly and the continued utilization of the OFS as a community facility is part of their community support. Julie Brackenreg nominated the roles that St John's Anglican rectors including Paul Perini, St James Catholic priests such as Fr Colin Fowler and Fr Dominic Murphy, Christian Life leaders Laurie and Heather Murphy, Hope Street pastors including Ross Coleman and herself in supporting the OFS. This spirit of cooperation has been extended through the conduct of joint services including Bapto-Catholic funerals at St James and memorial services at OFS. It has been the venue for many Memorial Services for past residents of the Estate, whose elderly yet supportive neighbours may have been unable to access their funerals when family have arranged them away from Glebe.

The Glebe Community Development Project under Ally de Pree's management, the City of Sydney's Glebe Service Centre under the management of the late Nick Hespe as well as Housing's Donna Rose have all played a vital roles in supporting the OFS as a community centre, particularly after Hope Street defunded its Glebe ministry. And of course the local community contributes to its operations – in particular the team of 22 community members who volunteer at Have-a-chat café weekly, taking responsibility for packing bread, making coffees, serving cakes and snacks, doing dishes, running craft classes, tending to the courtyard garden and generally caring for the space.

The OFS continues to host celebrations such as family reunions. It is these and other community dependence on the OFS which make it so valuable, nay essential to Glebe. When asked what would be the consequences for Glebe if the OFS did not remain suitable for use as a community centre Julie Brackenreg's response was immediate; *"Devastating for the community."*

The OFS as a valuable community asset

While the OFS has remained property of the Department of Family and Community Services, specifically its Land and Housing Corporation the building itself has suffered many negative consequences due to inadequate maintenance. In 2009 when Julie Brackenreg was largely the de facto manager of OFS a severe storm resulted in a section of the roof caving in as torrential rain, which could not run off due to blocked gutters and downpipes poured into the building. The upstairs room suffered severe water damage to cornice and plaster walls while the downstairs carpet was totally saturated. Although the roof and gutters were replaced, the hall carpet taken up and new carpet laid the upstairs room was merely repainted. It subsequently bloomed with mold and mildew and became uninhabitable, while the carpet layers uncovered a gaping hole in the floor. It was not repaired but simply carpeted over. Julie recalled placing objects over that spot so nobody walked there.

In 2010 Ally de Pree of GCDP contacted Julie to inquire what work was needed on the premises. This was because Mirvac, the owner and management of Broadway Shopping Centre had offered to provide materials and labour for a Communities Charity Day working bee on a local building. They undertook outside cleaning, kitchen floor recovering and internal painting of the whole premises. Permission was sought from Land and Housing Corporation management for the work, but their main concern was only

that the external heritage facade be maintained unaffected. This was the last reported substantial work undertaken at the OFS.

For much of the period 2004 to 2012 it appears that the management of the OFS was largely left to Hope Street personnel. Formerly the Department of Housing Project Officer had filled the role of a booking agent but this seems to have lapsed when the role was discontinued. When a booking time at the centre was requested for a new activity, Codependency Anonymous during the late 2000's no schedule existed to find when it was available. Generally this wasn't a problem as regular users such as those previously listed and other later users including Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, had occupied their well-known time slots for some time. However one Sunday, when Julie Brackenreg turned up to conduct a Hope Street church service she discovered members of the Glebe Branch of the Labor Party with local Federal member of Parliament Tanya Plibersek in attendance already there. A satisfactory outcome was negotiated but the premise is clearly in high demand, and it remains in use on all days of the week at most times. A recent problem (2017) with damage from a fallen tree branch which rendered it uninhabitable for a few weeks until it was repaired was quite problematic for both the community and the service providers.

Currently an upgrade of the terrace rooms is being undertaken so that Housing NSW can extend its outreach services at the OFS on two full days per week. This is a welcome move, but it is impinging on time other services can spend in the premises. In particular the Legal services provided each Tuesday by Redfern Legal Service and NSW Law Society on alternate weeks may need to be relocated. Several other activities based at the OFS are also likely to be affected. It is to be hoped that no overall reduction of amenity results.

Since 2012 the GCDP under Ally de Pree's management has taken an active role in supporting the community's use of the OFS, and through liaison with Housing NSW maintained its position advocating the vital role OFS plays as a real 'Peoples Hall', the title added to the facade of the building during one of its many adaptations. Having identified the many and varied activities which have occurred and still do take place at the Old Fire Station, it now seems totally inadequate and unjust to refer to it as a *de facto* community centre. It is the beating heart of the community in which it is deeply embedded, specifically for those resident in the Glebe Estate who visit it regularly. It is indeed a *Peoples Hall* and incumbent upon the whole community to support its continued existence and maintenance as a community centre, preferably and if possibly, *de jure*.

