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Methodist Ministers  
Housing Society

## OUR STORY

### 1947 – 1948

**After WWII, property prices were high and rented property hard to find. The Methodist Church realised that after years of faithful service, their retiring ministers were struggling to find and afford a new home after leaving the manse.**

Two main factors were behind this. The first is the itinerant nature of Methodist ministers' lives: tending to move every five to eight years, they never settle long in an area. Secondly, their stipends do not usually provide enough for them to save up for a home in retirement.

About a third of retiring ministers find themselves in this position. The rest have been able to make provision for themselves, often due to inherited wealth or a spouse who has worked in another capacity.

**The turning-point came on 29<sup>th</sup> April 1947, in the form of a generous donation. The ownership of a property known as The Manor House in Barrow-on-Tent in the County of Derbyshire (along with its orchard garden, paddock and other buildings) was transferred to the Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, stipulating that it be used to house retired Methodist ministers of limited means.**

**In 1948, the Methodist Ministers' Housing Society was formed, registered with the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1893.**

### 1949 – 1950



15<sup>th</sup> June 1949 saw the stone-laying take place at the gifted property. With the help of the Ministers' Retirement Fund, the Association built 20 new flats in the grounds and in September 1950 the first ministers were housed.

The flats are still there today, although they are no longer in our ownership: as our understanding of our tenants' needs grew, we aimed to provide less isolated properties and sold off the flats one by one. However, the scheme was heralded as a remarkable achievement and provided a substantial start for the young organisation.

### 1953 – 1969

Through generous donations, bequests and grants from individuals, trusts and funds, the Association continued to flourish. In particular, the Society has always benefited greatly from The Joseph Rank Benevolent Fund, the Auxiliary Fund, the Methodist Insurance Company and the Ministers' Retirement Fund.

By 1953, the Society owned 60 dwellings. By 1969 this had grown to over 200: the MMHS had now cleared its waiting list and could house ministers as they retired.

As the Society gained in experience, it formed the desire that every minister should – as far as humanly possible – think of the rented house as their own, free from central interference and unwanted inspections. Help was always available when required, and any necessary repairs could be set in motion with the minimum of fuss.

**1973 - 1989**

By 1973 the Society owned 333 dwellings. It became established policy to give ministers a fairly good choice of properties and areas, often buying a property specially. Pressure on the Society grew when it undertook the housing of widowed partners of ministers who died in service. Demand grew again when the Church accepted women ministers, creating the need to house their widowers on retirement.

In the early 1980s we developed the Equity Sharing Scheme, enabling ministers to contribute towards the purchase of a property if they wanted something bigger, or differently located, than what we could offer. In 1989, despite the grave difficulties caused by the dramatic rise in property prices, we added our 700<sup>th</sup> home.

**1998 - 2013**

1998 marked the celebration of the Society's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary: its Golden Jubilee.

Until now our Secretaries and employees had been employed by the Methodist Church, but in 1998 the Society appointed its first official employee and first Chief Executive, Mr Garry Smith. By 1999 we had 6 members of staff, with just one PC and a small laptop. Our records for each property and each tenant were sent to a document storage company, who scanned every single document onto a document storage system.

In 2000 we began offering our tenants a telephone alarm system, providing reassurance and peace of mind. Pressing the alarm button alerts the response unit, who then phone to see what help is needed. By now the Society had 936 properties. We moved from our first address (1 Central Buildings, Westminster) into Methodist Church House, Marylebone.

In 2001 Garry Smith introduced the first IT system, with a network of PCs and a server as well as a document management system. The Society moved from manual accounting records to a computerised accounting system based on a huge accounting exercise of incomplete records. Garry was also responsible for revising the equity sharing scheme to increase the maximum equity contribution held by tenants from 49% to 70%, and he also introduced the Transfer Policy which allows tenants to transfer to another property if they meet the necessary criteria.

In 2002 we appointed a Chief Executive, Mrs Shelagh Morgan. Shelagh increased the pastoral care element of the Society, and in her 9 years of service she visited or met nearly all our tenants. She also introduced the document management system Genysis, Sharepoint, Housing IT system Omniledger, and modernised the IT functions, restructured the Society's departments and introduced middle management.

In 2008 we celebrated our 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary at the House of Lords. Later on that year the start of the recession created cashflow problems for the Society, which had to borrow £2.5million in order to be able to carry on its business. Shelagh's quick reaction to the recession, and the emergent strategy adopted to ensure its existence, were highly commended.

By 2010 the society had paid back £2 million of the loan to the Fund for support of Presbyters and Deacons. In this year the society's legal department embarked on a huge exercise to electronically register all the Society's Land Titles, meaning that all historic documents had to be skilfully collated and filed at the Land Registry. Some titles had not seen the light of day since the early years of the Society's incorporation, and the benefit of having titles registered is immeasurable.

In 2011, Chief Executive Peter Shearer joined the Society. Peter commissioned a review of the IT systems and as a result a major investment was made to introduce a new improved network system.

In 2012 Peter initiated the first review of the Society's rent structure since the inception of the Society, conducting the largest face-to-face consultation with residents in the Society's history. The aim is to increase the Society's rental income by 2015 to cover its operating costs, while still keeping rent levels lower than market rents.

In 2012 the Society introduced a working-from-home facility, including emails linked to smartphones to make this easier. During the London Olympics, the Society's staff were encouraged to work from home. The Society also introduced a new document

management system M-files and in 2013 we commissioned a complete review of our repairs and maintenance services.

### Today

Today we have just under 1,000 properties, from the Channel Islands to the north of Scotland. Owing to the volatile housing market, we still seek to house ministers in our existing properties rather than buying new ones.

Almost from the very beginning we have managed to house all those who have come to us in need of accommodation. We are proud to provide homes for over 900 retired ministers, deacons and their widowed partners, so they can enjoy their well-deserved retirement.

Our story continues with growth, care, challenge and partnership. Find out more in [Our Mission, Our Work, Our Vision and Support Us](#).



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