

OUR WINTER GET-AWAY TO DAYLESFORD

Thursday 26th June was a rather dismal wintery day but that did not deter 13 members of the Combined Probus Club of Belmont Central to set off for a day at the Convent Daylesford.

When we arrived we were warmly greeted before being taken into the café for a lovely Devonshire Tea, after which we then adjourned upstairs to the chapel for a brief history on the Convent.

The Holy Cross Convent was the home of the *Presentation Sisters* for 90 years . However before their arrival, the building was home to a number of interesting personalities dating back to 1860's gold rush.

In 1890 Reverend Michael Gough, Archbishop Thomas Carr and local pastoralist John Egan purchased the house on Wombat Hill for 3,000 pounds. It was used as a Presbytery until it was deemed the priests were "being denied many things that were conducive to comfort". In 1891 Archbishop Carr envisioned a "**source of light and edification**" for the community of Daylesford, thus announcing the arrival of the Presentation Sisters to set up a **convent and boarding school**. A decline in the number of Nuns entering the convent, as well as dwindling student numbers, led to the boarding school officially closing in 1973. It was run as a community centre for many years. In 1981 the four remaining nuns moved to a newly built Convent beside Daylesford's St. Peter's Church. Sadly the Convent and it's gardens were left to decline into dereliction. The Nuns sought a new owner who would give the property new life.

Tina Banitska was that person! In 1988 she purchased the historic Convent even though it was in a severe state of disrepair. She reinforced the values of the Presentation Sisters by providing a **place of enlightenment** for all and an **inspirational space for artists** of all styles.

The building reopened as the **Convent Gallery on March 31st 1991**, with over 5,000 visitors on that weekend. Many people regard the Convent as the finest privately owned art gallery in Australia.

After the talk we all explored the four levels of the convent and admired the various artworks (which are all change every 8 weeks) before heading down to the gift shop. We all made sure we had our winter, jackets, scarves and gloves on before heading out to lunch at the local Daylesford Bakery. The cold weather certainly did not stop us from thoroughly enjoying the day in Daylesford.