



**Friends of the Orphan School, St. John's Park Precinct
New Town Tasmania
www.orphanschool.org.au**

7th Annual Report 17 August 2014

It is an honour to present the 7th Annual Report of the Friends of the Orphan Schools, St John's Park Precinct.

It is now seven years since the Friends of the Orphan Schools, St John's Park Precinct, was established at a public meeting held in St John's Church, New Town on 14 December 2007. The group was formed to:

- raise awareness of the historical importance of the precinct and the need for conservation;
- conduct research into the history and heritage significance of the site;
- encourage the development of a Conservation Management Plan; and
- work towards listing on the National Heritage Register.

The Group is constituted as an independent community group under the umbrella of the National Trust of Australia (Tasmania). Members of the Group, however, are not required to be members of the National Trust, although many of them are because of their commitment to heritage. Our finances and administration are separate. Nevertheless, the National Trust remains an important partner, helping with a range of issues including publicity, insurance and practical advice. An important part of the Friends work is promoting awareness of the site and our activities. We are included on the National Trust of Australia (Tasmania) website.

At the Annual General Meeting held on 18 August 2013, we elected the following Committee for the 2013-2014 year:

Convenor: Dianne Snowden
Deputy Convenor: Christine Leppard-Quinn
General Secretary: Andrew Cocker
Minute Secretary: Lorraine Davidson
Treasurer: Simon Cocker
Assistant Treasurer: Roger Stott
Committee Members: Bernadette Bell, Peter Gaggin, David Lewis, Berry Dunstan
New Town Primary School (ex-officio): Di Smith

Sue Newitt kindly acted as Returning Officer.

Following the formal meeting, we visited the South Wing (Female Orphan School) to hear about Kickstart Arts activities from Artistic Director, Jami Bladel.

In February, we acknowledged the death of our inaugural Secretary Kate Carlisle. Kate was a hard worker who was committed to the work of the Friends group from the time it started.

Throughout the year, your Committee once again has worked extremely hard on your behalf. I thank them all very much for their energy, enthusiasm and support. The contribution of volunteers in the heritage sector is essential for the protection of our heritage places.

Andrew Cocker continues to wear many hats on our Committee: as Secretary, Membership Secretary, Hall Manager and Web Manager. Andrew conscientiously maintains our website. The 'Find an Orphan' facility continues to generate interest and is a significant factor in raising our profile. At the 2012 AGM, I reported that more **than 200 people** had claimed orphans. Last year, there were **668**, more than one in ten orphans claimed. This year I can report that **725 orphans** have been claimed and many researchers have been contacted by other descendants through this facility. Andrew has recently added two advanced search options and

encourage you to speak to Andrew about these options. I am sure that you will agree that our Web Manager has done a remarkable job. As many of you are aware, this facility is based on the work of Joyce Purtscher, who generously provided information which she compiled over many years of painstaking research.

Andrew also maintains our membership records. We currently have 65 financial members. I would urge all of you who are not financial to renew as soon as possible. The greater our membership numbers, the stronger our advocacy voice.

Simon Cocker, once again, has done an exceptional job as Treasurer. Simon is also our photographer; many of you will have seen his photographic record of our activities and of the site. Simon has also acted as Project Manager for the Chalet Restoration project, which is nearing completion. He asked me to mention today that \$3000 is required to complete the verandah and steps into the Alan Rogers Chalet: this comprises \$2000 for labour and \$1000 for timber. We are hoping for a donation of timber. Please talk to me if you can help. I urge you to visit the chalets to see their remarkable transformation and also to come to our Wattle Day event on Sunday 31 August, when Simon will speak about the history of the Tasmanian Consumptive Sanatorium, 1906 - 1946 and its role in the treatment of tuberculosis. Very little of the original sanatorium remains - the most intact are the two chalets which have been the focus of a conservation project by our group. With largely volunteer effort, the Alan Rogers Chalet and the Rechabite Hut that have been sitting decaying on the hillside at St John's Park have been repaired, painted and lifted into new foundations to form an important element in the interpretation of the Precinct's history.

Committee member Peter Gaggin continues to work on developing overlay maps of the site, starting with the earliest found, to help in understanding the historical development of the site. He also donates the use of his office facilities.

Lorraine Davidson has done an exceptional job with the minutes and, with Bernadette Bell and Di Smith, works on our education and schools programs. Bernadette also organises our Publicity. All are extremely reliable and conscientious,

and I thank them for their contribution. Lorraine is retiring from the Committee this year, due to family commitments, and we will miss her.

David Lewis joined the committee last year and cheerfully helps out wherever he is needed, and particularly in liaising with St John's Church. Berry Dunstan, who is also on the Board of Kickstart Arts, also joined the Committee last year and has been an invaluable liaison point for Kickstart Arts.

Our successful excursion and speaking program has continued. A recent visitor was Andrew Wilkie MHR, who was impressed with the history of the site and the work we are doing. Our tour guide team recently added David Lewis, who specialises in the history of the Church. Thank-you to all of the team and also to Bernadette who organises catering and publicity for the tours.

Last year we participated in Heritage Tasmania's 'Open Doors' program which ran over the weekend of 1-3 November. Our tour was the first to be booked out and we offered an additional tour to cater for the high level of interest. The ground floor of the South Wing (the Girls Orphan School) and the ground floor of the North Wing (the Boys Orphan School) - including the theatre - were opened for the event. Joyce and I, with the assistance of Committee members, were tour guides. Jami Bladel from Kickstart spoke about her program which operates from the South Wing and David Featherstone gave a superb organ recital.

The Research and Publications Committee, convened by Chris Leppard-Quinn, has had a quiet year. The new Committee met for the first time in November and focussed on planning. Negotiations are underway to produce a small booklet about the St. John's Precinct which will include stories of some of the orphans who passed through the Orphan Schools. It is proposed that the booklet will sell for about \$12 and be available for tours and presentations. The group is currently researching possible grants to assist with this project. Other publications being considered include a small booklet listing the children who died and were buried here and a booklet focussing on the Aboriginal children admitted to the Orphan Schools. The

Group also completed a stock take and review of publications held and is currently assessing the content and updating material where necessary.

Our annual Fox's Feast celebration was held on Sunday 16 February. Life member Joyce Purtscher presented an excellent paper on other children's institutions. It was much enjoyed by a good-size crowd of regulars as well as some new faces. During the event, I launched an appeal for interpretation for the Burial Ground, which as you know currently has nothing to indicate that it is a burial ground. We recently received a design proposal which will be available for inspection at our General Meeting on 31 August.

Since 2011, *Tasmanian Ancestry*, the journal of the Tasmanian Family History Society Inc., has been regularly publishing 'Voices from the Orphan Schools', a series of articles which I have written about the lives and experiences of children admitted to the Orphan Schools.

I obtained a small grant from *Colonialism and its aftermath (CAIA)* to obtain copies of SWD (the Orphan Schools records). Some of these have been digitised by TAHO but without internet access in the hall, we needed another format to be able to view the records here.

This is our seventh year of the *Friends of the Orphan Schools, St John's Park Precinct*. I think we have done a remarkable job in raising the profile of the site and its significance - thanks largely to the dedication and generosity of our membership. To the Committee, members and supporters, thank-you all very much for your contribution and commitment. I look forward to working with you over the next year.

Dianne Snowden
Convenor
17 August 2014