



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

8th Annual Report 2 August 2015

It is now eight years since I founded the Friends of the Orphan Schools, St John's Park Precinct, at a public meeting held in St John's Church, New Town on 14 December 2007. The aims that we identified in our first year, however, have not changed and remain 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.

Many more members of the community, in Tasmania and beyond, are now aware of the existence of the Orphan School buildings and their history. An important part of the Friends' work is promoting awareness of the site and our activities as well as undertaking research about the site.

In August 2014, we elected the following Committee for the 2014-2015 year:

Convenor	Dianne Snowden
Deputy Convenor	Christine Leppard-Quinn
Secretary	Andrew Cocker
Minutes Secretary	vacant
Treasurer	Simon Cocker
Assistant Treasurer	David Lewis
Public Officer	Simon Cocker
Web Manager	Andrew Cocker

Hall Manager	Andrew Cocker
Committee Members:	Bernadette Bell
	Berry Dunston (<i>Kickstart liaison</i>)
	Peter Gaggin
	David Lewis
Research & Publications Committee	Christine Leppard-Quinn
Special Interest Groups	
Descendants of Orphans, convenor	vacant
Ex-officio members	
St John's Church	Rev. Bill Stewart
Ogilvie High School	vacant
New Town Primary School	Di Smith

A highlight of Fox's Feast, held in March, was the sharing of stories by descendants of orphans. We are now publishing some of these in the newsletter, and they have been favourably received. A significant number of orphans have been claimed on our website. The Orphans' Memorial Garden is conscientiously maintained by Joyce and Joe Purtscher, and I thank them both for their hard work.

Early in the year, on behalf of the Committee, I responded to the Legislative Council Inquiry on Built Heritage. As a result of the submission, I was contacted by Selina Ross of ABC News. She was intrigued by mention of the burial ground in our submission and asked for an interview which was screened as a Sunday night news feature. As a result of that, I was contacted by engineering firm GHD who asked if we would agree to the company undertaking a geo-physical survey of the burial ground. GHD was keen to do this as a community service and so there is no charge. Last Saturday work began on the survey. It received news coverage on all three Hobart TV stations as well as ABC News online. There was a follow-up interview with ABC's Leon Compton on Monday morning. As a result of the publicity, we have been contacted by a woman in Sydney who, as a young teenager, was walking through the burial ground on the day the headstones were removed, as well as by a local man who shared his memories of the headstones and burial ground. When the survey is finished, we plan to hold a community-open day to explain the project and share the findings.

In May, an excursion to *Shene* was organised for members. Thank-you to Bernadette Bell for arranging this.

Also in May, Richard Bladel addressed the committee, outlining Kickstart's program and its successful completion of renovations in the South Wing of the Orphan School. He noted that the renovations had been undertaken in collaboration with DHHS and managed by our committee member Peter Gaggin. There will be a formal launch of the renovations, on Friday 21 August from 6pm to midnight. The Friends Committee have formed a strong

partnership with Kickstart and look forward to continuing to work with Jami and Richard Bladel and their team.

Other presentations to the Committee have been from Derek Jones, with his ideas for the Burial Ground interpretation, and Lucy Frost who spoke about the *Footsteps to Freedom* project.

On Sunday 28 September John Stephenson presented a talk on 3D imaging, using his Point Puer research as an example.

The Chalet Project has been an outstanding success and if you haven't seen the conservation work, I would urge you to do so. A special Wattle Day event will be held next month, with a focus on the chalets. We have accepted Ruth Mollison's kind offer to landscape the area around the chalets. Simon Cocker has completed a draft history of the chalets and this is currently being reviewed before publication.

Our tours have been held intermittently because of a lack of tour guides. Our Life Member Joyce Purtscher helps out when she can and this is greatly appreciated. Simon is arranging tour guide training so we can replenish our numbers of guides. Two large family groups have booked tours: the first, in March, was part of the O'Neal family reunion and it was led by Simon Cocker with the assistance of Peter and Andrea Gaggin. The second is tomorrow, for about 30 descendants of convict woman Catherine Brett who lived on the site.

In November 2014, Bernadette Bell and Lorraine Davidson, with the assistance of David Lewis, took two Grade 1 classes from Lindisfarne Primary School around the site. This was a particularly successful activity and I would like to thank all three for organising this. Lorraine also took a Grade 2 class from New Town Primary School for a walk around the precinct, talking about a day in the life of an orphan. Joyce has also taken school groups. Our educational program is an important way of engaging the interest and understanding of young students.

Andrew Cocker as Website Manager organised for our website to be stored on the Pandora digital archive at the National Library of Australia.

Our Christmas Committee meeting was held at the *Ocean Child Hotel*, which was built by Orphan School boy, Robert Wiggins (who also, incidentally, designed the Infant Orphan School at the top of the site).

I would like to thank all members of the committee for their tireless work and commitment. Christine Leppard-Quinn has decided to step down from the Committee and the position of Deputy-Convenor but will remain as Convenor of the Research and Publications Committee. In the absence of a Minutes Secretary, members of the committee have shared minute-taking and I would especially like to thank them all for their assistance. Berry Dunston has also picked up the role of Membership Secretary.

To the Committee, members and supporters, thank-you all very much for your contribution and commitment. I look forward to continuing to work with you over the next twelve months. It gives me great pleasure to present the 8th Annual Report of the Friends of the Orphan Schools, St John's Park Precinct.

Dianne Snowden (Convenor)