



FRIENDS OF THE ORPHAN SCHOOLS

St John's Park Precinct New Town Tasmania

Issue 24

NEWSLETTER

May 2016

Introduction

My name is Bruce Lindsay. My great grandfather survived 11 years as an 'orphan' in the boys' Orphan School at New Town, while both his parents served 14 year sentences. Your Committee has asked that I prepare future issues of the Newsletter, in collaboration with Dianne Snowden.

They will be issued quarterly, and your contributions are earnestly sought, on any matter related to the Orphan Schools. Please send your material by email to me at newsletter@orphanschool.org.au, or post discs or handwritten items to me at 33 George St, Scottsdale 7260. Any organisation's newsletter depends on its members for its vibrancy, so please feel comfortable to offer anything of interest.

Recent publication

Dianne Snowden, 'Five little fellows blue and shivering with cold: caring for children at the Orphan Schools', *Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers and Proceedings*, Volume 63, No.1, April 2016, pp.60-72. (The Journal has an image of the Orphan Schools on its cover).

Expressions of Interest

The Committee of the Friends of the Orphan School would like to hear from anyone who is interested in being trained as a volunteer guide to take visitors around the site. Group walking tours are arranged by negotiation. The tour

includes a visit to St John's Church (where possible). Hours are flexible but it would be great to have a team to share the advertised tour time of the last Sunday of every month and other times.

Training will be provided. For more information, please contact Dianne Snowden: convenor@orphanschool.org.au

Official opening of Chalets by Her Excellency The Governor

Preparations are in hand for this official opening on the afternoon of 10 September 2016. More details to come.

Female Convicts Research Centre Seminar 'Prologue: the story behind the convict story'

This seminar will be held on Sunday 23 October 2016 in the Hobart Town Hall. Expressions of interest for delivering papers is now invited to FCRC Admin info@femaleconvicts.org.au

For Friends Bookworms

Friends may not know of an excellent reference titled *New Town: A Social History*, by Kim Pearce and Susan Doyle.

Although listed as being published in 2002 by the Hobart City Council, staff in the Council's publications section advise that it never was published, although two copies survive (RT39901) in the reference section (second floor) of the Tasmanian State Library in

Murray Street, Hobart. The book comprises 144pp packed with carefully footnoted details including a highly informative chapter on the Orphan Schools, together with others placing it into the social and physical context of New Town. The friendly staff allowed me to copy the chapter covering the Orphan Schools.

Fox's Feast, 2016

Fox's Feast was remembered by the Friends at the Orphan Schools site in New Town on February 28. The Friends Committee joined members from late morning on an overcast February day, at the Old Sunday School, where memorabilia and Friends' publications mixed with all-day tea and coffee for the participants. Roger and Karen Stott offered produce from the St John's Community Garden.

Purchasing a booklet titled *The First True Friends of the Queen's Orphanage*, I noted that, in fairness, Fox's Feast should – at least from 1873 – have been known as *Fox and Dexter's Feast*. In that year, George Dexter's bequest of £534 topped Fox's generosity by £34, but carried the complication that it was only to be applied to children within the Church of England, who were regularly outnumbered by Roman Catholics. While it appears that the quantum of both bequests supported 'Feasts' until the Schools closed in 1879, they created headaches for the Trustees in terms of the fund's later distribution.

But such issues did not impinge on the pleasure of a detailed tour of the surviving buildings, led by Dianne Snowden, who described their function and the roles played by the children. Of particular interest are remnants of the commercial bakery – now exposed outside – which provided bread for the inmates and some training for orphanage children. The physical beauty of the original infants' school remains a feature of the grounds, although sadly the original gardens have long disappeared.

Back at the Sunday School building, Dianne presented readings and details from original documents, describing the nature of early 'Feasts' and participants were offered booklets on historical aspects of the Schools. Sadly it was not possible to inspect the interiors of any of the site's surviving buildings, including the Church, which that afternoon hosted a superb recital by Melbourne organist, Thomas Heywood, on the outstanding 1886 Hill & Son organ.

This writer would love to see a future such remembrance emulate the food and music which children from the Schools would have experienced, all of which is described in contemporary newspaper reports. Any offers to put together a 'fife and drum band'? Where can we buy a 'seraphine'?

MUSIC AT THE ORPHAN SCHOOLS

The organ recital following this year's Fox's Feast prompted questions about music training at the Orphan Schools. The 1848 Report by Inspector of Schools, Charles Bradbury, mentions that children attended Chapel daily, again on Wednesday and Friday evenings, and at both services each Sunday. He mentions one blind boy 'the best singer in the school', and alludes to hymn-singing in the girls' school, but nothing of music training or performance. Although 'a

portion of them... form a choir, and have seats on either side of the organ'.

His Report gives no weight to the value of music in the Schools' curriculum, nor mentions music beyond hymns in Church. But in the early 19th century many congregations opposed music beyond being led by a precentor. In her book *Colonial Organs and Organbuilders*, Mrs E N Matthews states, of the Independent Church, Melbourne, that 'most of the congregation entertained a strong conscientious objection to instrumental music' It was then common practice for congregational music to be led by a small instrument called a 'seraphine', wholly unable to support hymn singing beyond introducing the melody and establishing the key signature. Seraphines resembled early reed organs, blown by pedals and played from a keyboard, and one such instrument was the first used in St John's.



Above. A seraphine from the early 1800s, perhaps similar to the original instrument in St John's Church. The large pedal on the right pumped the bellows. There was only one set of reeds, allowing no change to its basic sound.

As early as 1837 Church records note that the 'organist' would receive £30 per annum, and in 1839 'Mr McLeod of Battery Point played the organ twice on Sundays', and that 'Mr Madden, the Assistant Master, was considered quite competent to undertake the singing department'. We may

therefore assume that, however basic, the children *did* partake in some form of music instruction, at least as part of their worship in St John's Church. This view is supported by a notice in *The Colonial Times* of 28 December 1841, that 'Any gentleman or lady willing to undertake the duties of Organist at St. John's Church, New Town, and to instruct the children of the Orphan Schools in psalmody, is requested to communicate with the Head Master.'

The seraphine was by 1840 considered inadequate for its task, and was sold for £25, replaced by an harmonium – an instrument fundamentally similar, but with more than one set of reeds, allowing variety to volume and tone. These instruments were widely used by churches unable to afford pipe organs, and where music was generally confined to hymn-singing. However, their volume of sound was extremely limited, and in the space of St John's could only hope to introduce hymns or support small groups, or perhaps a children's choir.



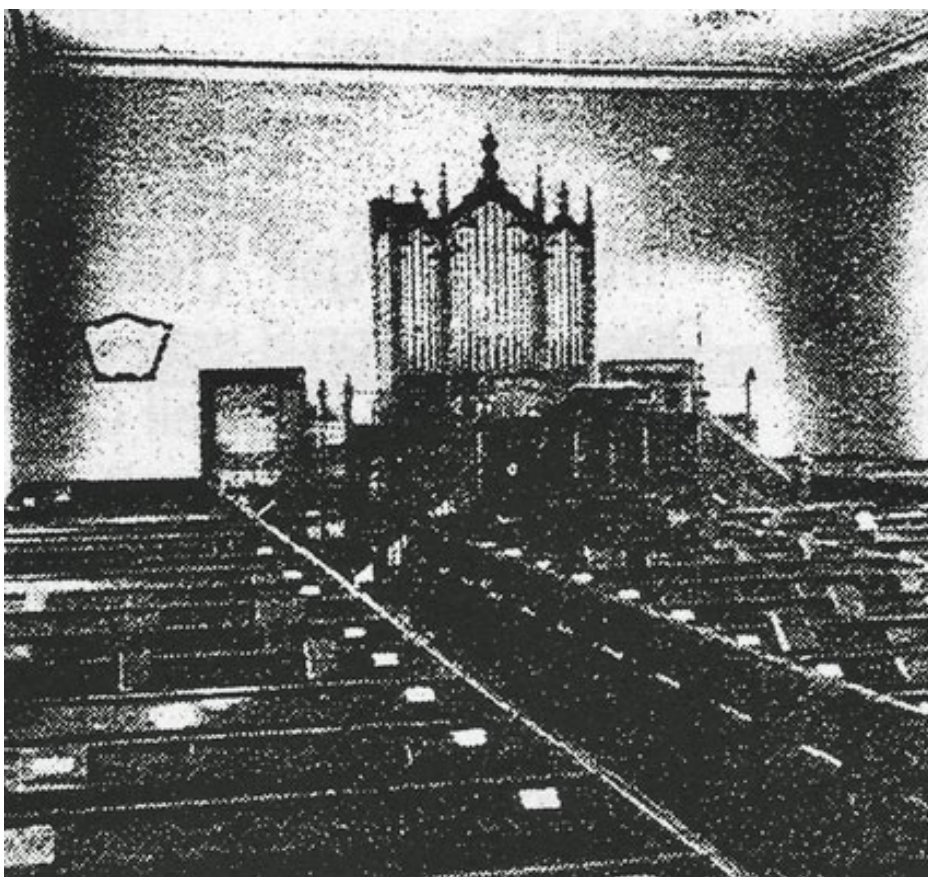
This is a typical reed organ. The larger pedals supplied wind to bellows, attached to multiple sets of reeds (selected by the white stop tabs) which gave more volume and variety than was possible with the seraphine.

A big step toward adequate church music at St John's was taken in 1850, when a fine English made pipe organ, built by the London firm of Gray and Davison, was installed. There was a local organ-building industry, beginning in Melbourne, but then in its infancy,

and its products varied hugely in quality, which justified the extra cost of importing an organ. It comprised one manual (keyboard) and a pedalboard, with seven speaking stops (or ranks of pipes). It was contained within a very attractive Gothic-style case of stained and polished English oak, with gilded face pipes. Most of its pipes were of large scale (or volume), which would have produced a sound capable of carrying community singing. Church records tell that in 1882 the organist was paid £20 per annum, while the poor soul who pumped the organ (there was no electric blower) and rang the bell was paid £4.

Halls. Hill organs were noted for their powerful clarity, and the original specification – of two manuals (keyboards) pedalboard and 15 ranks of pipes – would, for the first time, have adequately supported choirs and community singing at St John's, aside from offering the opportunity for solo recitals. It was installed in 1886. The original organ was eventually sold in 1889 to St John's Presbyterian Church in central Hobart, but was replaced by a new instrument in 1901, which incorporated perhaps five ranks of the original organ, but its lovely case was destroyed.

action in 1955, allowing the case to be infilled, and the console located remotely. On the earlier image, note on the right the harmonium which replaced the seraphine – perhaps kept as a spare... (Images courtesy Organ Historical Trust of Australia website).



The first pipe organ in St John's by British firm Gray and Davison. But this image shows the organ after it was purchased in 1889 by St John's Presbyterian Church, Hobart. (Image from 'Pipe Organs of Tasmania' 3rd edition, 2002, Item 14).

That instrument served until the mid-1880s, when the bold step was taken to acquire a large instrument by the noted English firm of William Hill & Son, builders of the superlative organs in both the Sydney and Melbourne Town

The Hill instrument was rebuilt in 1955, and again in 1977-8, on each occasion its specification being enlarged first by Hill, Norman & Beard (successors to Hill & Son), and later by Laurie Pipe Organs. Since that time the organ has been superbly maintained and further enlarged.

The 1886 Hill & Son organ, below in its original form with mechanical action (and therefore its console located within the organ case), and next as rebuilt with electro-pneumatic



This significant instrument was installed following the closure of the Orphan Schools in 1879, but served the parish of St John's New Town. In 1905 the Churchwardens noted that 'the music in the Church had received much attention; the efforts of the Organist in training the boys deserved special praise'. By 1911, they recorded that 'a very successful concert, in aid of the choir funds, has been

held, and the Carol Service held just before Christmas (when the Moonah Choir joined with S. John's) was very enjoyable'.

Aside from church music, at some stage a band was assembled from children in the Schools. Reporting on that year's Fox's Feast, *The Mercury* newspaper of 22 February, 1865 said 'officials arrived at the scene of recreation shortly after midday and were joined by several members of the youthful Band of Hope – the recently organised band of juvenile musicians from the Institute...'. The same newspaper reported, in the following year, that 'Mr Gagliardi had his drum and fife band on the ground...'.
From 1867 there is routine mention of 'the band' in reports of the Feasts, and on 31 January 1870 *The Mercury* noted 'A juvenile operatic entertainment will be given at the Queen's Asylum by Mr Russell, to which the public will be admitted on payment of a small charge'. Mention of the band continues in newspapers up to May 1879, shortly before the Orphan

Schools were closed.

While the concept of music as an uplifting and rewarding part of a child's development certainly appears to have developed over time at the Orphan Schools, yet the combination of untrained teachers and hapless supervisors, and a generally penny-pinching approach of the colonial and British bureaucracy toward the support of 'orphans', meant that realization was slow in coming. It remains intriguing just when and how the institution and the local church committed to the installation of what remains one of the very finest church organs in Tasmania, and the evolution of a musical tradition to which the children at New Town may have been only peripherally attached.

The author very gratefully acknowledges the kind assistance of Dianne Snowden, David Featherstone and Ian Wardle in the preparation of this article. See also Dianne Snowden, 'Voices from the Orphan Schools: Musical Voices', Tasmanian Ancestry, Vol.35, No.1, June 2014, pp.9-15.

2016 Deadlines for articles for newsletter

1 August 2016

1 November 2016

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