



FRIENDS OF THE ORPHAN SCHOOLS

St John's Park Precinct New Town Tasmania

Issue 27

NEWSLETTER

March 2017

Website Update

Our website manager and database developer, Andrew Cocker, released an updated version of our website earlier this year. He said it had been refreshed to reflect contemporary expectations around screen design and would now dynamically resize to suit smaller screens and touch-only devices such as phones and tablets. The menu has also been refined. As always, user feedback is very welcome; to webmanager@orphanschool.org.au.

Andrew also told us that the website had recently been subject to concerted ongoing spam and hacking attacks, predominantly from China and Russia. A number of security changes have been implemented in response to these attacks. The final step requires a full server rebuild which will shortly see the site unavailable for a few days.

'Reasonable Discipline'

Several newspaper articles dating from 1839 provide, for modern readers, insight into what we would regard as the appalling treatment meted out to boys at the Queen's Orphan Schools at that time. Such treatment was either performed by, or with the express consent of, Anglican clergymen charged with the inmates' care. It is heartening, however, that Governor, Sir John Franklin, instituted an enquiry via the School Board into allegations of what was even then regarded as extreme cruelty by the Second Master in the boys' orphan school, Mr John

Offer. A letter from Offer to *The Courier* on 23 August 1839 effectively summarised evidence against him, to which he sought to respond with a mix of indignation and obfuscation.

What seems irrefutable is that the Superintendent of the boys' school, Rev. Thomas Naylor, expressly listed flogging of the children as acceptable punishment, and in the Offer instance, instructed that two boys guilty of theft and absconding be returned to him (Naylor) after 'a good sound flogging'. Offer reportedly complied, using the cat-o-nine-tails to apply 20 lashes to the bare back of one boy, 31 to the other, despite Naylor's stipulation that 'no more than twelve lashes' be applied to children. He also stipulated that solitary confinement was an acceptable additional punishment! (Shades of other notable clergymen given power to order punishment, Rev. Knopwood in Tasmania and Rev. Marsden in New South Wales, whose cruelty was legendary).

What is even more stupefying is that the Board concluded 'That Mr Offer had had the interests of the Institution at heart, and that under a judicious superintendence, he is well qualified to perform, correctly and zealously, the very important duties entrusted to him'. Despite such a whitewash, Offer resigned his position, perhaps responding to the verbal bollocking given him by the editor of *The Courier*, who truly was concerned more for the children's welfare than 'the Institution'. Bruce Lindsay

Wanted: Green Fingers

The story of our memorial garden, which features each year in Fox's Feast, was covered in special edition Newsletter 16 in December 2012. (This and all past newsletters can be accessed from our website).



Less well publicised has been the last four years of devotion by our Life Member Joyce Purtscher and her generous husband Joe who have regularly cared for the garden and helped it to thrive. However, they have now asked that someone younger take over this role. If you are interested in knowing more about what is involved, please email the secretary, talk to Joyce or leave your name and number on our message service, 0362852654, and Joyce will call you back.

'One Small Inmate – John Lindsay'

John first appeared in official documentation when he was observed in a tinker's cart in northern Scotland, while his parents robbed shopkeepers at remote Sweetie Hillock. They were convicted and sentenced to 14 years 'across the seas'. John joined his mother on the vessel *Arab II*,

arriving in Hobart on 25 April 1836, shortly after the opening of the King's Orphan Asylum at New Town. By order of Governor Arthur, 13 children including John, confined with their mothers at Cascades, were admitted to the Asylum on 5 May 1836. Official records declared '#341, John Linsay (sic), Age 3 at Sept 5, 1836, Father unknown, Mother a Prisoner'.

In fact, his father was Isaac Williamson, transported earlier and assigned to a horse-breeder near Westbury. Sadly so few records survive of any performance of individual 'orphans' that it is impossible to extricate details of just how young John may have progressed. But he survived the epidemic of scarlet fever of 1843 (in which 56 inmates perished) to his release at age 14 in 1847, when he was apprenticed to the remarkable Mary Cox in Launceston. Mrs Cox continued her late husband's work as an hotelier and operator of the first coaching service between Launceston and Hobart, as well as raising nine offspring.

John's father died while felling trees near Launceston on 27 January 1843. His mother remarried bootmaker William Higgs, 13 years her senior, transported for life for stealing a gold pin. Upon John's release from Mrs Cox in 1851 (when he turned 18), he moved to Westbury where his mother and Higgs owned property, and took up the boot making trade, becoming known as John Lindsay-Higgs. He married Charlotte Wells, daughter of former convicts, at Westbury in July 1857; their first child was born in July 1858.

John evidently prospered, acquiring real property in Westbury. His family grew in size. His step-father subsided into alcoholism, lost his several properties, and hanged himself in December 1861. Devastated by that suicide, John deleted Higgs from his surname, and removed his family (by then comprising wife Charlotte and three children), first to a rural block at Liffey Plains, then via Portland to Warrnambool in Victoria's south-west. They settled in the tiny

village of Winslow north of the city, where from 1893 they operated the Winslow Post Office and Store, while producing a total of 14 children, all but one of whom reached adulthood.

Sadly John drowned, while drawing water for his family from a nearby lake, in November 1890. Obituaries at the time speak of an upstanding father and citizen, who contributed in many ways to his local community, and established the sober and hard-working Methodist ethos which influenced later generations of his family. He was my great-grandfather. I continue to search for the person or persons who mentored him during or following his release from the Orphan School, but so far the trail has yielded only frustration. Bruce Lindsay

PS At the Female Convict Research Centre's Seminar in October 2016, I met briefly a lady who was preparing a book on Mary Cox, but in my haste I did not record her details. If anybody reading this knows how I may contact her to request a copy of the finished book, I would be deeply grateful—Bruce.

Photo Request

Following research into the function of the galleries in St John's Anglican Church at the Orphan Schools precinct, we learned that the 1850 pipe organ installed in the Church was located in the gallery adjacent to the northern wall, just inboard from the tower stairway.

Despite careful searches, no photograph of the organ in that position has been found (the instrument, in much modified form, survives in St John's Presbyterian Church in central Hobart). If any reader knows of the existence, or better still, the present location, of such a photograph, Bruce Lindsay would like to hear from you. If you can help, please contact us.

Cocker Brothers Service Recognised

Friends of the Orphan Schools founder and convenor Dianne Snowden used the occasion of Fox's Feast to acknowledge the sig-

nificant contributions of Andrew and Simon Cocker to the work of the Friends. In awarding Certificates of Appreciation to the pair, Dianne noted the important work done over a period covering most of the life time of the group. Andrew has served as Secretary and Hall Manager and is solely responsible for converting the extraordinary research work of Life Member Joyce Purtscher into the Orphans Database. The database has attracted an extraordinary number of people with more than 1,000 entries claiming relationship to an orphan school child. Simon has served as Treasurer and Deputy Convenor and managed the project preserving the Alan Rogers Chalet and setting it up as a must-see part of the precinct tour. In response, both brothers attributed their interest in the site to Orphan School girl, Sarah Briggs (1839-1841), their great great grandmother.

Tour Guide Training

The first tour guide training took place in early March, with Jane Hodgman, Bill Friend, Richard Watson and Simon Cocker working with experienced tour guide, Robyn Everist, of Hobart Walking Tours. Robyn is helping the group define the tour, develop necessary information and anecdotes and utilise a range of range of techniques to entertain and inform tour participants. The Friends are always in need of more volunteers to spread the message about our heritage gem. If you are interested in volunteering, please get in touch with Convenor, Dianne Snowden, at dsn Snowden@tassie.net.au.

2017 Deadlines for newsletter articles

1 May 2017

1 August 2017

1 November 2017

Editor: vacant

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