Friends of the Orphan Schools and St. John's Park Precinct
New Town Tasmania

Issue 4 **N e w s l e t t e r** **September 2009**

Oral History Project Interviewers and Transcribers Required

The Research and Publications Committee of Friends of the Orphan Schools and St. John's Park Precinct is looking to establish an ongoing oral history project to record the recent history of our precinct. Over the past year or so we have collected names of people who would like to be interviewed, but in order to begin the project we require a team of volunteer interviewers and transcribers. If you are interested in being part of this group we will provide training in two workshops each of two to three hours duration. We have about twenty people from a range of backgrounds who have indicated they would like to talk about their connection to the site—some wish to share childhood experiences, others their time as healthcare providers and others their knowledge of St. John's Parish—we are keen to collect those memories.

Our committee considers oral history a valuable component of our work to raise awareness of the site and demonstrate its significance in the Tasmanian community. The experiences of ordinary people are an important, but often overlooked, part of historical, cultural and social enquiry. If you are able to help it would be much appreciated. The time commitment will not be onerous—attendance at workshops and an interview—it is guaranteed to be interesting and instructive and it would be a great help to our cause.

If you are interested in helping, either as an interviewer and/or transcriber, please contact Toni Sherwood either by email: **research@orphanschool.org.au** or phone: (03) 6228 5150

Calendar Dates

8 October at 5.30 pm. General Meeting with Gemma Webberly, a Churchill Fellow who will be speaking about her recent trip to heritage properties in the UK, and in particular how what she learned applies to our site. Parish Centre, St. John's Avenue, New Town. Free to members, gold coin for non-members.

10 December at 5.30 pm. Carols and Annual General Meeting with Guest Speaker at St. John's Church, St. John's Avenue, New Town. Free to members, gold coin for non-members.

Excursions

Sunday, 11 October 2.00 pm
Sunday, 8 November 2.00 pm

Tours of the Orphan Schools and St. John's Park Precinct in New Town have been organised for the second Sunday of the month in September, October and November. These include a visit to St. John's Church and a short organ recital. Learn about the site and its history from one of our tour guides—Joyce Purtscher well-known for her work on the children in the Orphan Schools and paupers, or Dianne Snowden our convenor and historian. Notes and afternoon tea are provided. Tours start at 2.00 pm. Donation of $10 requested. For bookings please phone: (03) 6234 1392

FOSP Research Day 26 September 10.00 – 2.30
State Library of Tasmania

The second FOSP research day was held on Saturday 26 September in the Microspace room, second floor, State Library of Tasmania, Murray Street from 10.00 a.m. until 2.30 p.m. If you would like to come along for the next day, we would welcome your help. To register your interest or for more information please contact Toni Sherwood either by phone: 6228 5150 or email: **research@orphanschool.org.au** or simply turn up on the day.

At our last research day, held on Saturday 27 June, a small but enthusiastic group of researchers began searching through issues of the *Hobart Town Gazette* from the 1830s for information about the Orphan Schools. We will continue this survey and then move on to research other institutions associated with the precinct in the same way.

The *Hobart Town Gazette* was a government authorised publication, established in 1816 and is the fore-runner to the current *Government Gazette*. It provides comprehensive details about government finances, legislation, tenders, appointments and absconders. This kind of close research provides invaluable information about the people who worked at the schools and the positions in which they worked, the types of goods required in such an institution and the amount of money the government saw fit to expend on caring for children in need.

St. John's Church October/November Program 2009

St John's Avenue, New Town.
Enquiries phone 6228 5965

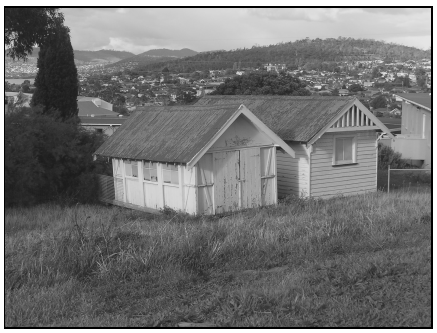
4 October, at 2.00 pm. Colour our world 'Songs of Praise'. Part of Seniors Week celebrations.

18 October, at 2.30 pm. Strings and piano concert/recital in aid of raising money for a new roof which is urgently required.

1 November, at 2.30 pm. Hobart Organ Society concert featuring choir and pipe organ looking also at different choral styles from 16th century to 20th century, also featuring both organists from St. David's Cathedral, Andrew Bainbridge and Craig Doherty, also organist Mary de Hoog. Admission by donation.

May General Meeting

Heritage Architect, Robert Vincent, was the guest speaker at our General Meeting on 14 May 2009. Robert is an enthusiastic supporter of Friends of the Orphan Schools and St John's Park Precinct and has a particular interest in the two isolation chalets: Rogers and Rechabite which are currently sitting in the grounds of the precinct. The chalets, designed by architect, Rudolph Koch, date from about 1906 and were among the first of a number of chalets, which along with a two-story dining room and kitchen block (built about 1919), eventually comprised the sanatorium of the Tasmanian Consumptive Association. This philanthropic organisation was formed in 1905 by a group of Hobart women, led by Mrs Henry Dobson and Georgina Kate Cox, wife of Colonel Cox, head of Tasmanian Forces. The women pushed ahead with their plan despite some opposition from government and private individuals opposed to institutional care in post-penal Tasmania. The Sanatorium, originally located in the far corner of the grounds of the New Town Charitable Institution and later the site of John Edis Hospital, developed as a village with buildings being added as funds came to hand. In its most active period it provided care for patients in various stages of the disease as well as military patients. The village lay-out and the design of the buildings reflected the dominant thinking that the best way to care for, and perhaps cure, people suffering from tuberculosis or the 'White Plague' as it was then known was to provide rest in an environment open to the elements.



Today the isolation chalets are in a sad state of disrepair and urgent work is needed to conserve them and also to protect them from vandalism or accidental destruction. Robert argues that these two buildings are an important part of our cultural heritage and as such they deserve to be conserved, preserved and properly interpreted. He contends that they are not just architecturally important buildings but are significant as relics of important issues in Tasmanian history. Robert's view perhaps accords with Michael Roe's view that the Sanatorium helped prompt broader confrontation with tuberculosis from individuals, organisations and government. For Roe the Sanatorium in the period 1906–1915 was a positive contribution to the problem of tuberculosis representing hope after the suffering of the nineteenth century and a period of stagnation until the 1930s when significant advances were made to treat the disease.

Michael Roe, *Life over Death, Tasmanians and Tuberculosis*, Hobart, Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 1999.

August General Meeting

St. John's Church - Capturing the Past to Ensure the Future

Sydney heritage architect, Paul Davies, was the guest speaker at our August General Meeting. Paul has recently completed conservation and restoration work at St David's Cathedral in Hobart and is currently preparing a conservation plan for St John's Church, New Town. His talk had a practical focus and was concentrated on his work at St David's and St John's as well as his local church in Sydney. He stressed the importance of peeling back the many layers of old churches in order to understand how they have been used in the past and to make informed choices about future uses.

Convenor: Dianne Snowden
Deputy Convenor: Toni Sherwood
Secretary: Karen Stott
Treasurer: Simon Cocker
Assistant Treasurer: Roger Stott
Public Officer: Karen Stott
Research Group: Toni Sherwood
Descendants' Group: Chris Woods
Web Manager: Andrew Cocker
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Committee Members: Rosie Davidson, David Featherstone, Warwick Oakman, Joyce Purtscher and Jessie Wagner.

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