Welcome to this special edition of the Friends of the Orphan School newsletter in which we share with you something of our celebrations to mark the completion of our Memorial Gardens project. This project has been ongoing throughout 2012 and was completed on 21 October with the unveiling of three memorial plaques bearing the names of the four hundred or so children who died while at the Orphan Schools.

More than fifty of our supporters braved wintry conditions to attend the Sunday morning ceremony at which the Lord Mayor of Hobart, Alderman Damon Thomas officiated. Our Convenor, Dianne Snowden welcomed the Lord Mayor along with our other invited guests: the Hon. Scott Bacon MP, Elise Archer MP, Matthew Groom MP, Rob Valentine MLC, Aldermen Phillip Cocker and Leo Foley, and Emeritus Professor Lucy Frost from the Female Convicts Research Centre based at the Cascades Female Factory Historic Site. Dianne then outlined her family connection to the Orphan Schools and provided some sobering insight into life and death in the institution. Before unveiling the plaques, the Lord Mayor spoke of the precinct as a place of some sorrow. He attached a partic-
ment. His insightful comments and enthusiastic support were much appreciated.

The project has been a very satisfying undertaking for the Friends of the Orphan Schools, St John’s Park Precinct. We have been overwhelmed by some generous donations and the many messages of support and thanks we have received, including several from people who were sad they could not join us on 21 October. Anne Atkinson from Victoria sent this lovely message:

*As I live in Victoria I will be unable to attend this event. But I would like to thank you all for this beautiful gesture on behalf of my Great, Great grandmother’s daughter Caroline Little. It is so nice to know she is not forgotten.*

And from those who were there we also received important messages. Kerry Sherston Smith wrote that “Benjamin Sherston was a great-great uncle to me, and it is very important to me to see this plaque in place and these poor souls given the respect that they deserve.”

The garden is now well established and thriving – the roses are blooming and the box hedge shows much evidence of new growth and together with the plaques is a lasting memorial to children who otherwise would not be remembered.

The Committee would like to thank:

A & M Porteous
Colleen Read
Elise Archer
Maurice Appleyard
Brian Mansfield
Aileen Ashford
Andrew Cocker
Kerry Sherston and Matthew Smith
Simon Cocker
Lucy Frost
Berry Dunston
Sue Collins
Shirley Kerin and family for their generous and kind donations towards this project – they are very much appreciated.
Please enjoy Dianne’s opening remarks, which follow. For those of you who were interested in a list of the names of the children who died while at the Orphan School we have included photographs of all the plaques. They are also available on our web site.

**Convenor Dianne Snowden’s Address**

I am the proud descendant of an Orphan School boy. His name was William Butler and he was my great-great-grandfather. William was ten when he arrived in Van Diemen’s Land with his convict mother, Margaret, and two-year-old sister, Mary Ann, on the convict ship Tasmania (2) in 1845. Like many hundreds of children, William was taken from his mother on arrival and admitted to the Male Orphan School. Mary Ann was admitted later to the Female Orphan School. William and his little sister were two of the lucky ones. Three of William and Mary Ann’s shipmates, Robert Burgess, and Ann Byrne, both aged two, and Sarah Ann Kelly, aged ten, all died in the Orphan Schools. Remarkably resourceful and resilient, both William and his little sister not only survived but went on to have large families in NSW.

More than 400 Orphan School children were not so fortunate. They died in the Orphan Schools between 1828 and 1879 and it is to remember them that we gather here today. I particularly remember the young Aboriginal children removed from their parents and country, who are buried here. There are many tragic and heart-breaking stories about the children who died in the Orphan Schools. These include a child who died shortly after having been punished with fifteen lashes on the bare back. The rate of mortality in the Orphan Schools was frequently commented on in the colonial press and public health advocate Dr Edward Swarbreck Hall repeatedly called for reform.

I would like to read to you an extract from Hugh Munro Hull’s memoirs. He describes coming across an orphan’s funeral in 1844:

> The Queen’s Orphan Schools are situated about two miles from Town, on the front of a gently rising hill, and with the Church between the two buildings, make altogether a good appearance. The Schoolhouses are large brick buildings containing an immense number of rooms, and there are at present about five hundred children of both sexes in them — most of these are the children of the female convicts ... I once, on rambling out towards the Schools last summer heard the Church bell tolling for a funeral, and being curious to see the funeral of one of the little Orphans, I hastened to the Church. Numbers of small mourners with tearful faces showing that they understood the nature of the mournful pageant filled the aisles of the Church. As they left the building two and two walking together towards the burial ground, the sun was just setting behind Mount Anna, and there was not a sound in the air, and on reaching the Gate they commenced singing a beautiful hymn, and their clear little voices rose in harmony. The coffin containing the remains of their little companion who had left them for a better and happier ‘playground’ was carried by four boys on handkerchiefs. On the coffin being lowered into the grave each little child crept to the edge of the dark hole to take a last look, and then moved away, some of them sobbing bitterly. I followed them into the Churchyard and found many of the tiny graves covered with green grass and small flowers, evidently showing that the hand of a friend had been there.

Finally, as we pause to remember those children who died in the Orphan Schools, I urge you to remember, too, those who left the Orphan Schools to an uncertain future, apprenticed out as farm labourers and domestic servants. We do not have a list of those who died as apprentices but they included Ada Byron, described as a girl of colour, about 15 or 16 years of age, who died in mysterious circumstances in Launceston, probably from an assault; John Martin, about 15, who drowned in Launceston; Benjamin Sherston, who died while pressing hay and Claravance Barker, who died in Hobart.

In 1871 The Mercury, reporting Claravance’s inquest, commented

> The children of the Asylum when apprenticed out have no further care bestowed upon them. They have no home ties, no one to whom they are entitled to appeal, or from whom they can with childlike confidence seek advice. They are left to the tending of those who, it is to be feared, as a rule look on them as little better than so many beasts of burden, if not plagues and annoyances, to be cuffed and
kicked about at pleasure. How their little hearts must pine and bleed, and how sadly must they often realize the poet's words:

- Alone, that worn out word,
- So coldly spoken and so idly heard:
- Yet all that poets tell or grief hath known
- Of hearts laid waste, dwells in that word
- Alone.

The newspaper continued:

Some such feeling seems to have oppressed the girl [Barker] for on “a very wet cold day” she, for fear of a beating, sat “in the yard from about 12 o'clock to 6,” and told a witness “she had no friends, and wished she were dead” and she told the witness’ daughter that further beating would drive her to “go and drown”

Dianne concluded her address with further thanks to the Lord Mayor and “our many members and supporters, especially those who have made the generous donations that allowed us to have the plaques created and installed. Above all, I would like to thank our Committee who work quietly behind the scenes to bring an event like this to fruition, motivated by their commitment to the Orphan Schools and the children who lived here, and their belief in the importance of the site as a nationally significant heritage place. In particular, I would like to thank Joyce Purtsher and Rosemary Davidson whose meticulous and painstaking research over many years has been an integral part of our Memorial Project.”

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for your support during the year and wish you a safe and happy Christmas and New Year.

Our first event for 2013 is our Fox’s Feast Picnic Day on Sunday 24 February. We will be in touch early next year with more details but please put this date in your diaries.