

# Friends of the Orphan Schools

*St John's Park Precinct New Town, Tasmania*

## Newsletter 46, December 2023

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### ***Seasons Greetings from the Friends of the Orphan Schools Committee!***

### **More than 150 Years Ago**

During 1871 the Orphan Schools (now the Queen's Asylum for Destitute Children) had faced their fair share of challenges. In common with the colony's other public welfare institutions the Asylum's operations had been subject to a Royal Commission and long time campaigner for the welfare of the children, Dr Edward Swarbreck Hall, had been publicly critical of its Principal, Dr John Coverdale.

However none of this was in evidence in the following account of the orphans' end of year treat at Government House.

### **BENEVOLENT**

Yesterday afternoon the children belonging to the Queen's Asylum were entertained in the Government House grounds by the Hon. Mrs. Du Cane, pursuant to a long-standing invitation. The boys, girls, and infants of the establishment, preceded by the Asylum band, under the conductorship of Mr. Champion, reached Government House at 2 o'clock, accompanied by the Principal of the Asylum, and the teachers and attendants. The little folks were marched to the lawn facing the river, where they separated for recreation, and disported themselves to their hearts' content until four o'clock, the time appointed for feasting. An ample supply of cake, sandwiches, strawberries, and cherries, with milk and tea, was provided for the children on long tables at one side of the lawn, to which the youthful guests, as may be supposed, did substantial justice, being overlooked by Mr.

and Mrs. Du Cane, Commodore Stirling, and a number of clergymen and other visitors, who are known to take an interest in the Orphan School children.

During the afternoon the string band belonging to H.M.S.S. Clio was stationed on the terrace, by permission of the Commodore, and played some excellent music, under the leadership of Mr. Howard H. Smith, bandmaster. Among the pieces played by the band were the following Quadrille, "Princess of Trebizonde" (Arkan); walses, "Kroll's Ball Klan je" (Lumbye); Cavatina, "Anna Bolina" (Donizetti) ; Polka D'Concert, "Alexandra" cornet obligato (Stenebuyan) ; walses, "Songs of the Season" (Coote); selection, "Nabuco" (Verdi); Galop, "Invitation" (Coote).

For the teachers and attendants of the Asylum, and the visitors, an appropriate spread was laid out in the large dining room at 5 o'clock.

The children were afterwards marshalled by Mr. Roberts, the head master, assisted by Mr. Mulhall, the second master, and took their departure, grateful for the hospitality of the Hon. Mrs. Du Cane, and the genuine kindness of the Governor and the members of the vice-regal family, which will not soon be forgotten by the recipients.

*The Mercury (Hobart, Tas. : 1860 - 1954)*, 20 December 1871, p. 2.

<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article8868762>

Thanks to Richard Watson for this item from TROVE <https://trove.nla.gov.au>

## Development of St John's Park Site – Submission from the Friends of the Orphan Schools

The last newsletter referred to government plans to 'transform St Johns Park in New Town into a contemporary Health and Wellbeing Precinct' starting with a Master Plan for the site.

Since then President, Dr Dianne Snowden AM, has made a submission relating to the Master Plan on behalf of the FOS. As the Master Plan is of fundamental importance for the future of the site Dianne's submission is reproduced here in full.

### SUBMISSION ST JOHN'S PARK DRAFT MASTER PLAN

General

## What are your initial thoughts on the impacts of the Masterplan to you/your staff/your organisation?

The Friends of the Orphan Schools, St John's Park Precinct, is a volunteer community group formed in December 2007 to highlight the importance of the significant Orphan Schools heritage site and ensure its conservation and protection.

The group aims to:

- Raise awareness of the historical, architectural, social, cultural and archaeological significance of the Precinct and the need for conservation
- Conduct and support research into the history and heritage significance of the site
- Encourage the development of a Conservation Management Plan
- Successfully list the Precinct on the National Heritage Register as a place of 'outstanding heritage value to the Nation'.

The group occupies the Old Sunday School building (1882), formerly known by the Department of Health as 'The Hall' (and often incorrectly referred to as the Parish Hall).

Established as a Sunday School after the closure of the Orphan Schools in 1879, it is a building with significant heritage values. It is used by the Friends of the Orphan Schools as an interpretation and research centre; for meetings about the history of the site; and for special occasions such as the annual 'Fox's Feast' event, for descendants of Orphan School children. The term 'orphan' was used loosely and did not mean children without parents, as we would use the term today. Most had at least one parent living.

In March 2023, at a special two-day event, the Friends of the Orphan Schools acknowledged the 195th anniversary of the establishment of the Orphan Schools in Van Diemen's Land. Many visitors travelled from interstate and there were two overseas visitors, highlighting the need for public accessibility to the site and the potential for cultural heritage tourism. Her Excellency the Honourable Barbara Baker AC launched the latest publication from the Friends of the Orphan Schools. [1]

The Friends of the Orphan Schools are concerned that the Draft Master Plan does not provide information about the place of community groups in the proposed development of the site.

As founder and President of the Friends of the Orphan Schools, and as an historian, genealogist, and heritage consultant, I am concerned that the Draft Master Plan has been created without reference to the 1996 Conservation Management (the most recent

Conservation Management Plan for the site) and without first undertaking a comprehensive heritage assessment.

### **Thinking about St Johns Park currently, what do you value about the site?**

St John's Park Precinct is a nationally significant heritage site as a place which has provided health and welfare services and institutional care for almost 195 years. The Orphan School buildings, designed by noted colonial architect, John Lee Archer, in 1829 and constructed between 1831 and 1833 by convict labour, along with St John's Church, built in 1834, form the nucleus of the Precinct. The Orphan School was the first purpose-built, government-run institution for the care of children in Van Diemen's Land. Nearly 6,000 children, mostly the children of convicts, were admitted to the Orphan Schools between 1828 and 1879. Almost 50 of these children were Aboriginal, removed from family and country.

The Precinct has a unique and rich history. Since the 1830s, the Precinct has incorporated a number of late nineteenth and twentieth century buildings in a range of architectural styles. The Precinct also comprises two disused burial sites and plantings of historic significance which date from the 1840s.

For nearly 195 years, sections of the Precinct have been associated with the provision of institutional care and services for Tasmanians in need. Following the closure of the Orphan Schools in 1879, the original buildings operated for some years as the Male Division of the New Town Charitable Institution, eventually St John's Park Hospital, which closed in 1994.

An Infant Orphan School, added in 1862, became the Female Division of the New Town Charitable Institution in 1874. In the twentieth century, several buildings were constructed to provide care for war veterans, children with paralysis, those with an intellectual disability, and elderly people suffering from early dementia.

In recent times, the Precinct has provided administrative welfare services and operated as an aged care facility. The significance of the Precinct is historical, architectural, social, cultural, and archaeological, and, while various individual buildings have heritage registration at either local or state level, the significance of the site as a whole is not formally recognised.

The Friends of the Orphan Schools value the site for its significant historic heritage values and its rich history: as a place of institutionalised health and welfare care since 1833. It demonstrates the official response to disadvantaged groups within society, including destitute children, Aboriginal children and the aged, from the convict era until the

present. Many of the buildings on the site are rare within Tasmania. The Orphan School buildings are a rare example of a convict period institution. Other buildings within St John's Park, including the Old Rectory, the Watch Houses, and the Infant Orphan School, have significant heritage values. The place is well known to many Tasmanians who know it as St John's Park Hospital; it has strong social, cultural, and spiritual associations for many. (The phrase 'going behind the clock', a reference to entering St John's Park hospital for aged care, is frequently cited.) The site also has strong associations with several people prominent in Tasmania's history, including Lieutenant-Governor Arthur; architects John Lee Archer, James Blackburn, and Edward Casson Rowntree; and the social reformer and public health advocate Edward Swarbreck Hall.

The more research we undertake, as the Friends of the Orphan Schools, the greater our understanding of the many complex layers of the site and the more we value it for its historic heritage values and rich history, its contribution to Tasmanian history and its place in the Tasmanian community.

### **Is there anything that is not working as well as it could at the moment?**

There is not a current Conservation Management Plan: the most recent is that by Godden Mackay in 1996. [2] In the absence of a more recent Conservation Management Plan, this is the primary reference for conservation work on the site.

Recent developments on the site have not considered the requirements of the Conservation Management Plan.

Many buildings are in disrepair and are in urgent need of conservation work. These include parts of the original Orphan School buildings, the ground floor of the Old Rectory, and the damaged Orphan-School era stone wall. The Burra Charter states that the first action in conservation management is to make a site safe and secure. To this end, all the heritage buildings on the site should have an individual Conservation Management Plan.

There is a lack of respect for the heritage significance of the site. Recent infrastructure development including the hard kerbing in Middle Road, and in front of St John's Church was done without consultation or heritage approval and has had a negative impact on the heritage values of the site. The white chain barrier in front of the Church is particularly inappropriate, especially considering there are alternatives available for both safety reasons and for those with low vision. The repainting of the remaining sanatorium chalets was done without consultation. Considerable research by heritage architects went into the choice of colours for these two small buildings when they were restored by The Friends of the Orphan Schools.

Signage lacks consistency and cohesiveness, and there is no interpretation explaining the heritage significance of certain sections of the site. This is especially the case for the Burial Ground but also for significant nineteenth-century buildings such as the North and South wings of the Orphan Schools (John Lee Archer, architect, 1829); the James Blackburn Watch Houses at the beginning of St John's Avenue (1842); the Old Rectory (designed by John Lee Archer); the bakehouse; the old dairy; the Superintendent's residence; the Old Sunday School (Edward Casson Rowntree, architect, 1882); and the former Infant Orphan School (designed by former Orphan School boy, Robert Wiggins, 1862, now owned by Southern Cross Care).

Significant twentieth-century buildings, including *Gellibrand*; *Wingfield*, and the Sanatorium Chalets (restored by the Friends of the Orphan Schools) also suffer from lack of interpretation. St John's Avenue, with oaks planted in 1897 to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, and the remnant Orphan School stone wall (now in disrepair) are also significant but not acknowledged as such.

### **Public access and open spaces**

**We would like your feedback in relation to public access and open space amenity of the site. This may include traffic disruption, parking, environmental impacts, changes to public amenity and safety, construction impacts. In terms of public access to the site as well as the amenity of the site:**

#### **What is most important to your organisation?**

Public access to the site and its open spaces is essential.

One of the largest open spaces on the site is the Burial Ground and the Friends of the Orphan Schools believe that it needs to be recognised and protected for its historic heritage values. The first recorded burial in St John's Burial Ground was of a 12-year-old boy, Thomas Hibben Morgan from the Orphan School, in December 1836. The last was that of Archdeacon F.T. Whittington in December 1938. In this period of over 100 years, there were up to 2,000 burials. The names of the children who died in care, including Aboriginal children, have been recorded on plaques installed in a Memorial Garden established by the Friends of the Orphan Schools, adjacent to the Old Sunday School. Over 400 children died, mostly of preventable diseases.

In 1963, some vaults and tombstones were removed to Cornelian Bay Cemetery, relocated in the Church of England section F. These removals were privately arranged. The largest vault is that of the Swan family with eleven known burials recorded. Many of the remaining headstones were also moved to Cornelian Bay about this time and placed

in the south-western corner near the old crematorium. More recently they have been relocated to an area in the former paupers' section nearer the entrance to the cemetery.

Although the Friends of the Orphan Schools have published a comprehensive list of the burials in the St John's Burial Ground, research into the removal of monuments and human remains has not been undertaken. [3] Only one monument remains, that of Matthew Forster, Comptroller-General of Convicts. Consideration should be given to the return of the remaining headstones to the site.

The extent of the Burial Ground, and its boundaries, has not been determined. Yet the Department of Health has proposed an unsympathetic development at the top of the Burial Ground and has stated publicly that it has called for tenders, without the development application process being completed.

Intrusion into the Burial Ground area was precluded by legislation in 1961 – *The St John's Park Improvement Act*– and to the best of my knowledge, this has not been repealed.

Because the Burial Ground boundaries have not been clearly delineated, inappropriate development has taken place, including the establishment of a car park immediately in front of the Old Sunday School and possibly at the top of the site. The Clive Hamilton School for Nursing was also constructed on the Burial Ground, close to the Roman Catholic Burial Ground (1852), as was part of Wingfield. There is also an access road through what is believed to be the bottom of the site.

The Tasmanian Heritage Council Practice Note 11 must be considered in relation to any development on the Burial Ground, and an archaeological assessment is required as a first step. The delineation of the boundaries is essential.

The Draft Master Plan must not be piecemeal: the proposed development at the top of the Burial Ground must be part of the Master Plan, not separate from it.

### **What are the opportunities to improve/what is not working as well as it could be?**

The Draft Master Plan process appears *ad-hoc*, rushed and ill-informed. It appears to have already decided the basic elements of redevelopment on the site: consultation is almost an afterthought and is difficult given lack of detail in the Draft Plan. The proposal for increased parking, for example, has no detail, and so it is difficult to comment fully. Already, there is parking on the Burial Ground in front of the Old Sunday School: 'Additional parking on the site will create a more pedestrian friendly site for consumers, visitors, carers, and staff'. It is not possible to make a comment without knowing where the increased parking will be and what impact it will have of heritage values.

More detail at this stage of the process would help understand the Department of Health's intentions for the site.

**What would you consider to be the key considerations for the project team when developing the masterplan?**

The project team must reference the 1996 Conservation Management Plan as the most recent document which comprehensively considers the heritage site (but bearing in mind parts are outdated).

The Draft Master Plan document (May 2023) notes: 'Buildings unsympathetic to site heritage to be removed'. Which buildings? Where is the heritage assessment of those buildings considered unsympathetic? How is this to be determined? It should be at the forefront of any planning process.

Nomination to the National Heritage List, emphasising continuity of use over almost 195 years, should be a key component of the Draft Master Plan.

## **Services**

**The Draft Masterplan proposes that services across the Health and Wellbeing Precinct will be delivered in dedicated clinical and support service zones, aimed at promoting connectivity, safety, and efficiencies. Do you have any feedback about the location of services within the precinct?**

There is no doubt that health services are much needed. However, it is essential that the location of these services respects the heritage values of the site and is informed by the Conservation Management Plan (1996). Before any final decisions are made, there must be a heritage assessment of the site as a whole and its individual buildings.

## **Urban design and landscaping**

**The Precinct will provide unique green spaces for community enjoyment, exercise, and reflection and healing Gardens. The Precinct will provide safe and connected walking paths, including a pedestrian loop to connect key public areas with open space – improving amenity for consumers, visitors, carers, and staff.**

**When considering the design of the urban spaces within the Health and Wellbeing Precinct, and the landscaping of the site, what is most important to you? What would you like to see incorporated?**

It is difficult to comment on this question as there is no specific or detailed information about the location of the proposed 'unique green spaces'.



The most important consideration is the protection of heritage values. Aside from St John's Avenue, there are at least two other established avenues, one in front of *Wingfield* and the other in front of the *Old Rectory*. These are not intact but, nevertheless, should be preserved and protected.

There has been no study done of the vegetation on the Burial Ground, including the eucalypts, and it is essential that this is done before any landscaping decisions are made.

Landscape design could be used to interpret structures which no longer exist. The re-establishment of the network of pathways across the Burial Ground could enhance a redeveloped landscape.

Gwenda Sheridan's study of heritage trees includes other significant vegetation on the site and, again, this should be considered before any landscaping decisions are made. [4]

The National Trusts lists the 24 oaks in St John's Avenue on its register of significant trees: [https://trusttrees.org.au/tree/TAS/New\\_Town/St\\_JohnS\\_Park](https://trusttrees.org.au/tree/TAS/New_Town/St_JohnS_Park)

These trees are also listed on the Hobart City Council Register along with a horse chestnut at 12 St Johns Avenue., an English elm at 9 St John's Avenue., and the 2 English Oak trees at 14 St. John's Avenue either side of the church:

<https://www.hobartcity.com.au/Development/Planning/Significant-trees> .

A heritage assessment of the other trees on the site must be undertaken before any decisions are made about landscaping.

## Heritage

A key ambition of the St Johns Park Health and Wellbeing Precinct Masterplan is to respect and maintain the site's built and cultural heritage, acknowledge the history of the site and detail how the built and cultural heritage of the site can be preserved. How, if in any ways, would you like to see heritage, and storytelling about the site and its history, addressed?

The Burial Ground development needs to be reconsidered. Not only is it intrusive and unsympathetic, but it has been designed outside the Master Plan Process. It should be part of that process.

What opportunities do you see for the master planning process to consider:

Maintaining the heritage values of the site?

No comprehensive history of the site has yet been written.

The Master Planning process should acknowledge the importance of a heritage assessment of the site and individual buildings before any decision is made about the removal of 'unsympathetic' buildings.

Maintaining the heritage values of the site must be guided by an understanding of recognised heritage principles, including the Burra Charter and a site Conservation Management Plan (including Conservation Management Plans for individual buildings).

**Acknowledging the heritage values of the site e.g. through storytelling about the site and its history How, if in any ways, would you like to see heritage, and storytelling about the site and its history, addressed?**

St John's Park Precinct has unique potential for not only highlighting Tasmania's colonial past but also key elements relating to the history of child welfare, aged care, education, and the treatment of Tasmanian Aboriginal people. It can be a place not only for story-telling but truth-telling, and subsequent healing, particularly in relation to the *palawa*. The removal of children from family, including Aboriginal children, and their incarceration and treatment, is a 'story' that needs to be addressed. Brothers and sisters were separated in the Orphan Schools and there was little contact with family, if any. Families were not always reunited. This was government policy.

Heritage values can coexist with, and indeed shape, modern developments. It is important to remember, however, that story-telling and interpretation go hand in hand, and that, above all, any redevelopment must respect the history of the Precinct.

St John's Park Precinct is a complex site with many layers of development. Its colonial history is challenging and confronting yet essential to understanding the genesis of institutional care in Tasmania. The sympathetic and respectful interpretation of this history is essential if we are to understand the Precinct as a nationally significant heritage site and as a place that is relevant to contemporary Tasmanian society. It is still possible to read the history of the site in its extant structures, vistas, and landscape, and for this reason, they must be protected. When the Orphan Schools were built, they were designed to be 'out of sight, out of mind', hidden away from the centre of Hobart Town. Today, the site should be celebrated for its heritage significance and rich history, and for what we can learn from the past.

Dr Dianne Snowden AM  
President

Friends of the Orphan Schools Inc.

25 September 2023

## Coming Events

### The Richmond Bicentenary Convict Muster

The Richmond Bicentenary Convict Muster will be held on 10–12 February 2024 (the southern Tasmanian Regatta Day weekend).

Day 1 Saturday 10 February 10.30 am–3.30 pm: talks & displays, Richmond Town Hall & Supper Room.

Day 2 Sunday 11 February, talks & displays 10.30 am–3.30 pm, Richmond Town Hall & Supper Room.

Day 3 Monday 12 February 10 am–4 pm Convict family reunions & displays, Richmond Town Hall & Supper Room.

There will be information about how to research your convict ancestors and convict-themed music in Richmond Gaol and St John's Church, as well as other exhibitions. There will be trade tables from various organisations, including Tasmanian Archives, UTAS and local bookshops. The Female Convicts Research Centre and Friends of the Orphan Schools will also be participating.

Please note the program may be subject to change.

For more information please visit <https://www.richmond200.com/program/>

### Fox's Feast Sunday 25 February 2024

Old Sunday School, St John's Park Precinct

Our annual event for descendants of Orphan School children will be held on Sunday 25 February 2023 from 11 am to 2 pm. BYO picnic lunch. We will provide tea and coffee.

Fox's Feast was an event that brightened the often bleak year of the children of the Orphan Schools. John Fox, a former convict, was a waterman who plied his trade on the River Derwent. When he died in 1859, he left a bequest to the Orphan School children.

For more information, please contact [secretary@orphanschool.org.au](mailto:secretary@orphanschool.org.au)

# 2024 Deadlines for Friends of the Orphan Schools newsletter articles

1 February 2024

1 May 2024

1 August 2024

1 November 2024

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- [1] Dianne Snowden AM (ed.), *Hidden Histories of the Orphan Schools* (Hobart, 2023).
- [2] Godden Mackay, *St Johns Orphan School, Precinct Plan and Inventory Volume 1, Conservation Plan and Appendices Volume 2, Executive Summaries*, Dept. Environment and Land Management. July 1996.
- [3] Rosemary Davidson (compiler), *Deaths and Burials in the Parish of St John's New Town* (North Hobart: Friends of the Orphan Schools, St John's Park, 2010).
- [4] Gwenda Sheridan, *Heritage Trees Across Tasmania. The Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens' Nineteenth Century Connection. Volume 1*, January 2004, pp.70– 94.