



**Friends of the Orphan School and St. John's Park Precinct
New Town Tasmania
www.orphanschool.org.au**

3rd Annual Report November 2010

It is a privilege to be able to present the 3rd Annual Report of the Friends of the Orphan School and St John's Park Precinct.

It has been three years since the Friends of the Orphan School and St John's Park Precinct was established at a public meeting held in St John's Church, New Town on 14 December 2007. The group was formed to:

- raise awareness of the historical importance of the precinct and the need for conservation;
- conduct research into the history and heritage significance of the site;
- encourage the development of a Conservation Management Plan; and
- work towards listing on the National Heritage Register.

The Group was constituted as an independent community group under the umbrella of the National Trust of Australia (Tasmania). Members of the Group, however, are not required to be members of the National Trust, although many of them are because of their commitment to heritage. Our finances and administration are separate. Nevertheless, the National Trust remains an important partner, helping with a range of issues including publicity, insurance and practical advice. An important part of the Friends work is promoting awareness of the site and our activities. We have a segment on the National Trust of Australia (Tasmania) website and have been included in National Trust publicity throughout the year.

The Friends of the Orphan School and St John's Park Precinct Management Committee we were saddened to learn of the death of Jessie Wagner, one of our foundation members and a member of our inaugural Committee. Jessie died on 8

January 2010 and her funeral service was held in St John's Church. Jessie was devoted to her Church and to the Friends of the Orphan School, and she is sadly missed.

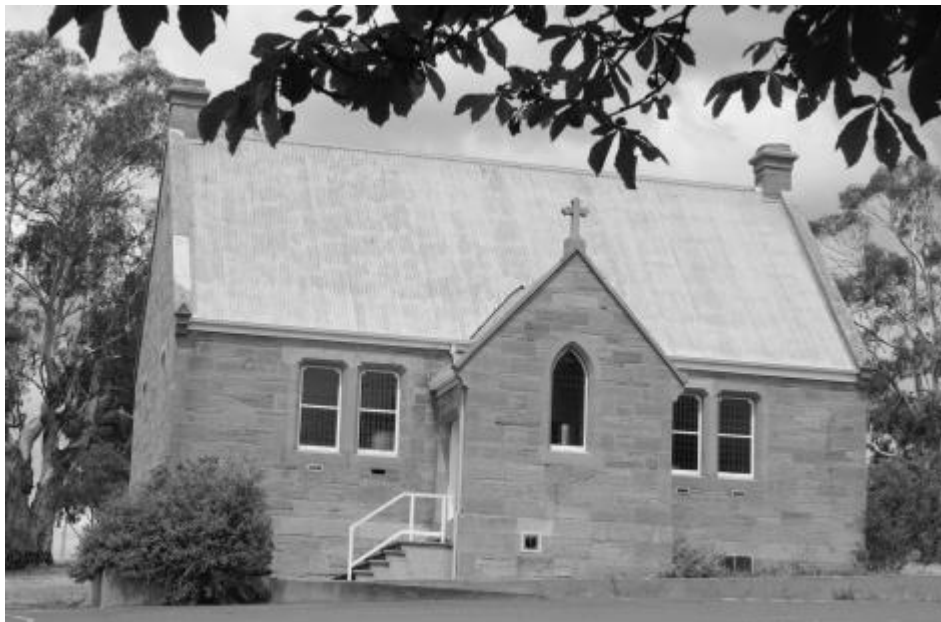
Once again, your Committee has worked tirelessly on your behalf and I thank them all very much for their hard work, energy and commitment. Andrew Cocker has done an outstanding job not only as Secretary but also as Web Manager and Building Manager. Andrea Gerrard has cheerfully performed the tedious job of taking the minutes. Simon Cocker has done an exceptional job as Treasurer, once again ably assisted by Roger Stott. Joyce Purtscher has continued our popular excursion program. David Featherstone has generously contributed his time when we have an excursion or special event; playing the organ in the Church and really bringing its history alive. Toni Sherwood and Rosie Davidson have produced an informative and professional-looking newsletter, much appreciated by all who receive it and a vital form of communication with members and supporters. All committee members have contributed generously to the smooth running of those general meetings we have had. We also thank Lisa Hutton for auditing our books.

The Research and Publications Group, with Toni Sherwood as Convenor, has continued to meet regularly in 2010. Quarterly research days in the Tasmanian Heritage and Archive Office, introduced last year, lapsed in 2010 but we hope to resurrect them in 2011. The Oral History Project we hope will also be revived in 2011.

Andrew also continued in the role of Web Manager and I am sure that you will agree he has done an outstanding job building and maintaining our website. The website was formally launched during the Heritage Festival in May this year. The theme this year was *Deco to Digital ... Our 20th Century Heritage*. On Sunday afternoon, 23 May 2010, the Friends of the Orphan Schools and St John's Park Precinct website: www.orphanschool.org.au was officially launched by the Hon. Lin Thorp, MLC, Minister for Education and Skills, Minister for Children and Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Ms Thorp has a long association with our group and remains interested in our progress and achievements. As our contribution to the Heritage Festival, we not only officially launched our website but also hosted a digital photographic display in the Old Sunday School which included images of John Lee Archer's architectural drawings for the original buildings. I am pleased to announce that this week Andrew installed a „Find an Orphan Search“ facility on the website. It is easy to use and a great starting point for research and sharing stories.

Chris Woods has continued to convene the Descendants of Orphans Special Interest Group and with a small committee successfully organised our second

Fox's Feast on 28 February 2010 in the old St John's Sunday School. Once again, the event included an exceptional photographic display. This event commemorates the annual summer picnic day for children at the Orphan Schools, which was funded from the estate of former convict John Fox. Fox arrived on the *Prince of Orange* in 1822 and received a conditional pardon in 1838. He never married and worked for many years on the Derwent River where he provided transport between New Norfolk and Hobart. At the time of his death in 1859 he bequeathed his estate of almost £500 to the Queen's Orphan Schools. He stipulated his bequest should stimulate the industry of the children and ... afford them at least once in the year a day of healthful and innocent recreation'. The first Fox's Feast was held in 1861 and then annually from 1865 until the closure of the Queen's Orphan Schools in 1879. Fox's Feasts were held at various locations including Cornelian Bay, the Cascades and New Norfolk. In 1877 the children were treated to a return train trip from New Town to Brighton and in 1878 and 1879 they travelled in the steamer *Monarch* to New Norfolk. The Fox's Feast tradition was revived in 2009 by the Descendents of Orphans Special Interest Group. This year, a new booklet *School Days at the Queen's Orphan Schools New Town, Tasmania 1848*, prepared by Joyce Purtscher from the Inspector of Schools Report, was launched. It is a fitting companion to her earlier publication, *The First True Friends of the Queen's Orphanages* (Hobart, 2009)



At the end of 2009, the National Trust leased the Old Sunday School on our behalf from the Department of Health and Human Services. We are working to establish an interpretation and resource centre in the building and Andrew Cocker, our Building Committee convenor, with assistance from the Committee and interested members, has spent a great deal of time and effort making this

happen. We now hire out the hall to the Tasmanian Family History Society Inc. This not only provides a source of income but helps promote the Friends group more widely. The lease is a significant development as it provides us with a 'home'. Andrew Cocker will be responsible for our Building Committee, which will oversee maintenance of the building and facilitate its use. If you would like to help, please contact Andrew.

The building now known was constructed in the early 1880's as a Sunday School following the closure of the Queen's Orphan School. Previously St. John's Church had used a room in the Orphan School but this was not available after the Orphan Schools closed in 1879. The building was designed by E. C. Rowntree and tenders for its construction were called in May 1881. Money to fund the school was raised by subscription from parishioners and a bazaar in August 1882 which contributed £27 16s 7d. The building was opened on 17 August 1882 by the Archbishop of Tasmania, Charles Henry Bromby, who was also a subscriber to the Sunday School.

We have been searching for a name for our building. Originally built as a Sunday School in 1882 for the St John's Parish, after the closure of the Orphan Schools, the building has been known as 'The Hall' for a number of years. Since gaining the lease we have referred to it, at different times, as the Sunday School Building, the Old Sunday School, the Sunday School Hall or simply the Hall. We have settled on 'The old Sunday School'.

When concluding my Annual Report for 2009, I noted that, in a very short time, our group has grown in strength and public recognition – thanks largely to the commitment and generosity of our membership. We are now at that crucial stage where we need to capitalise on our strengths and to consolidate, and to keep advocating for the conservation of the site, especially the most vulnerable areas.

Dianne Snowden
Convenor
11 November 2010