



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

4th Annual Report 21 August 2011

It is a privilege to be able to present the 4th Annual Report of the Friends of the Orphan School and St John's Park Precinct.

It has been four 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 is 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 were saddened to learn of the death of Denice Featherstone, wife of David. Both Denice and David have been great supporters of our Group and Denice will be sadly missed. I attended Denice's funeral on behalf of the Friends group.

In November, we elected the following Committee for the 2011 year:

Convenor: Dianne Snowden
Deputy Convenor: Toni Sherwood
General Secretary: Andrew Cocker
Minute Secretary: Andrea Gerrard
Treasurer: Simon Cocker
Assistant Treasurer: Roger Stott
Committee Members: Joyce Purtscher, Rosie Davidson, Lisa Hutton
St John's Church (ex-officio): David Featherstone
Ogilvie High School (ex-officio): Wendy Frost
New Town High School (ex-officio): Danny Neal

Throughout the year, your Committee has worked tirelessly on your behalf and I thank them all very much for their hard work, energy and commitment. This year we welcomed Lisa Hutton to the Committee. All committee members have contributed their time and energy generously, helping to consolidate the work necessary to the achievement of our aims. Andrew Cocker has continued as Secretary, Web Manager and Building Manager. Andrew has been assisted by Andrea Gerrard as Minute Secretary, a thankless task performed admirably by Andrea. Simon Cocker has done a superb job as Treasurer, ably assisted by Roger Stott. Toni Sherwood and Rosie Davidson continue to publish our comprehensive, informative and interesting newsletter. Joyce Purtscher has continued our successful excursion program. Joyce's tours of the Orphan School's Precinct are in great demand at the moment. She recently led a tour for the North Hobart Probus Club and has had regular requests through the year. In March she spoke to a group at Vaucluse Gardens. She is a tireless worker for the Friends of the Orphan School and we are grateful for all the work she does so generously. Besides her work as a tour guide, her research is the basis of our very popular 'Find an Orphan' page. This has proved an extremely popular facility on the website, with stories and photos being added on a regular basis. Each time I speak to Andrew about this aspect of our work, it seems the number of entries has increased significantly.

The Research and Publications Group with Toni Sherwood as Convenor, has continued to meet regularly throughout 2011.

On 24 January 2011, I submitted a nomination to the National Heritage List was on behalf of the Group, but no response has been received.

Our fourth annual Fox's Feast Picnic Day was held on 27 February 2011. This year the weather, although cool, was fine enough for a picnic, and most participants wandered down to St John's Orchard, the garden of the Lenah Links community group. The members of this group went to a lot of trouble to make us welcome. They provided hot drinks and a fire as well as sausages and hamburgers for those of us without a picnic. They also provided a well-stocked produce store. Ruth Mollison, convenor of the group, welcomed us to the garden and told us about their work. During the lunch break, Joyce and Rosie led a tour of the Precinct, which included the rear section of the Infant Orphan Schools. The group paused in the vicinity of the

former Roman Catholic Burial Ground where they scattered rose petals in memory of the orphan children buried there.

Rosie Davidson's book *Deaths and Burials in the Parish of St John's* was launched at this year's Fox's Feast. Canon David Lewis, rector at St John's, generously set aside time on his busy Sunday to come along to Fox's Feast and to launch Rosie's book. He spoke enthusiastically about the value of careful and detailed research such as that found in Rosie's work.

On Saturday 9 April 2011, we held a joint day-long seminar with the Female Convicts Research Group (Tasmania) – the new name for the Female Factory Research Group – in the Old Sunday School. The seminar's focus was the Orphan Schools of Van Diemen's Land; short papers of 15 minutes were presented by members of the Female Convicts and Orphan Schools Research Groups. About 50 people attended. Our group was well-represented. Andrew Cocker told the story of his great-great grandmother, Sarah Briggs. Sarah's mother died on their voyage to Australia and she was subsequently placed in the Female Orphan School. Andrea Gerrard gave an interesting and well-researched paper which explored three generations of the Quamby and Taylor families and their connection to the Orphan Schools. Rosie Davidson shared some of her research about the burial ground and Toni Sherwood presented some observations about the experience of childhood outside the Orphan Schools. Joyce Purtscher explored people's reluctance to admit they or their family members had been admitted to the Orphan Schools.

In May, we once again participated in the Tasmanian Heritage Festival, which had an agricultural theme, 'Lamingtons to Lasers'. We decided to focus on New Town's agricultural heritage. On Sunday 22 May 2011 and Sunday 29 May 2011 from 2:00 – 4:00 p.m. we presented 'Fertile Soil: New Town's Agricultural Heritage'. Our display mapped the trajectory of agricultural development and decline in New Town. St John's Community Orchard, run by the Lenah Links Group, was opened for visits on both days and we conducted tours of the precinct each Sunday, highlighting agricultural aspects.

This year we decided to change the date of our Annual General Meeting from a calendar to financial year. Thanks to the generosity of Jane Armstrong, at the conclusion of this meeting, we will visit the property once owned by George Gatehouse – a short walk from the Old Sunday School and an important heritage site. This visit also provides an opportunity to visit the cool storage facility for fruit established in a building once known as Mezger's bone mill. The Ockenden brothers and Dr Harry Benjafield developed the cool store in 1912.

We concluded 2010 with an inspiring End-of-Year concert featuring the Choir of High Hopes in St John's Church. From this, we contributed a small amount to the St John's Organ Repair Fund in appreciation of our partnership with the Church and especially the dedication and commitment of the Church Organist, David Featherstone.

I know that I have said this before but in a very short time, the *Friends of the Orphan Schools, St John's Park Precinct* has increased significantly in strength and public recognition – thanks largely to the dedication, commitment and generosity of our membership. To the Committee, members and supporters, thank-you all very much for your contribution and commitment. I look forward to working with you in 2011: there is still much work to be done.

Dianne Snowden

Convenor

21 August 2011