



**Friends of the Orphan School, St. John's Park Precinct  
New Town Tasmania  
[www.orphanschool.org.au](http://www.orphanschool.org.au)**

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**5<sup>th</sup> Annual Report 19 August 2012**

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It is an honour to present the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Report of the Friends of the Orphan Schools, St John's Park Precinct.

It is now five years since the Friends of the Orphan School, 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.

In August 2011, having changed from a calendar year, we elected the following Committee for the 2011-2012 year:

Convenor: Dianne Snowden  
Deputy Convenor: Toni Sherwood  
General Secretary: Andrew Cocker  
Minute Secretary: Colleen Read  
Treasurer: Simon Cocker  
Assistant Treasurer: Roger Stott

Committee Members: Lorraine Davidson, Rosemary Davidson, Lisa Hutton,  
Joyce Purtscher  
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 drive and dedication. The contribution of volunteers in the heritage section is often not acknowledged but without them the protection of heritage places would grind to a halt.

Simon Cocker, yet again, has done an outstanding job as Treasurer, ably assisted by Roger Stott.

Andrew Cocker wears many hats on our Committee: as Secretary, Membership Secretary, Hall Manager and Web Manager, and he wears them well. Andrew conscientiously maintains our website and is working on an update. By now, you will all be aware of the facility Andrew has created on our website 'Find an orphan'. This has generated a lot of interest and done much to lift our profile. To date more **than 200 people** have claimed orphans, and in some cases contributed information, including stories and photos, to our website. This facility is based on the work of Joyce Purtscher, who generously provided information she compiled over many years.

Joyce has continued our successful excursion program. Joyce's tours of the Orphan School's Precinct are always in great demand, and often include an organ performance in St John's Church, courtesy of our great supporter David Featherstone. As you all know, Joyce is an indefatigable worker for the Friends of the Orphan School and we are indebted to her and appreciative for all the work she does.

In April, we were sorry to farewell Lisa Hutton, who has gone to live in France. Before she left, Lisa organised local architect Peter Gaggin to develop overlay maps of the site, starting with the earliest found, to help in understanding the historical development of the site.

Colleen Read, who has done an outstanding job as Minutes Secretary, retires from the Committee at this meeting. Colleen volunteered for the job at our last AGM and has been a conscientious and thorough recorder of our meetings. We are sorry to see her go and wish her all the best.

Friends stalwart Rosie Davidson, who joined the Committee in its early days, has also moved, but only to Devonport, where she hopes to continue to have an active role in our group. Rosie compiled *Deaths and Burials in the Parish of St John's New Town*, just one example of her meticulous research. The Committee acknowledged Rosie's contribution at a special dinner at the *Ocean Child Hotel*, which was at one stage operated by one of Rosie's ancestors. (Another licensee of the *Ocean Child* was Robert Wiggins, admitted to the Male Orphan School in 1834 when he was eight years old. As well as being a publican Robert was a builder and contractor and he

built the Infant Orphan School in 1862. You can read more about him in our 'Find and Orphan' section on our website.)

The Research and Publications Group with Toni Sherwood as Convenor has continued to meet throughout the year.

Toni and Rosie have been responsible for producing our informative newsletter, an important means of keeping in touch with our members. The newsletter is available on our website.

In response to an increasing number of inquiries from students, both secondary and tertiary, Lorraine Davidson has produced an excellent and practical guide – *A Research Guide for Students* which is now available on our website.

*Tasmanian Ancestry*, the journal of the Tasmanian Family History Society Inc., has been regularly publishing 'Voices from the Orphan Schools', a series of articles which I have written about the lives and experiences of children admitted to the Orphan Schools. Some of these can now be viewed online.

It has been a busy and active twelve months, with a number of events and activities.

At the conclusion of the Annual General Meeting on 21 August 2011, our group visited the property once owned by George Gatehouse in New Town and an important heritage site. Thanks to the generosity of Jane Armstrong, who gave an excellent tour, we visited the property, including 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 hope to continue exploring other parts of New Town, an initiative of our Deputy-Convenor, Toni Sherwood.

In December 2011, our Treasurer, Simon Cocker and fellow members of the Grass Roots Union Choir gave an outstanding performance of songs from *Loveless in Hobart Town*, their musical based on the experience of Tolpuddle Martyr, George Loveless. The concert was held in St John's Church on Sunday 27 November 2011. Two hundred dollars was raised, \$100 of which was passed on to St John's Church Organ Fund.

Fox's Feast Celebrations for 2012, held on 26 February, focused on the dedication of the Memorial Garden for the children who died while at the Orphan Schools. The garden has been planted with a box hedge and carpet roses, carefully nurtured since planting and now growing well. This project has been the vision of Joyce Purtscher, who has co-ordinated its establishment. Joyce and her husband Joe worked on all the gardens that surround the Old Sunday School. They removed countless belladonna lilies, carted away many bags of twitch, spread mushroom compost and planted the gardens ready for the opening. Aileen Ashford, Commissioner for Children officiated at the opening ceremony in March. The memorial plaque for the children was unveiled by Shirley Kerin, a descendant of former orphans Elizabeth Ware and Thomas McAveady. Four generations of Shirley's family shared this occasion with her, some travelling from Victoria to do so. A framed photograph of the Queen's

Orphan Schools was presented to Shirley in acknowledgement of her family's generous donation of plants for the garden and the cost of the plaque and also to Joyce Purtscher for her hard work in bringing the project to fruition. Stage 2 of the project is almost complete. Joyce and Rosie have compiled a list all the children known to have died while at the Orphan Schools. The names of these children have been recorded on bronze plaques attached to the garden walls. We are currently organising an official event to unveil these additional plaques. Shirley Kerin and her son, Greg, from New Town Station Nursery have been strong and generous supporters of this project, and the Friends group generally. A number of other members have contributed to the plaque project and will be specially acknowledged at the unveiling ceremony when it is held.

On 18 March 2012, about 30 members of the Friends group visited the Willow Court Precinct at New Norfolk and took part in a walking tour led by heritage architects Robert Vincent and Paul Johnston. Inger Visby, President of the *Friends of Frescati*, a Special Committee of Derwent Valley Council, talked to us about the restoration work the group is undertaking in the community garden and showed us the recently discovered fish pond in the garden. A small group of volunteers have successfully conserved and rehabilitated a significant hawthorn hedge and a very early grape vine. Simon Rolfe of the Willow Court and Barracks Working Group, another Special Committee of Derwent Valley Council, guided us through the Barracks buildings and other associated buildings, many in need of urgent repair and attention.

In May, we again participated in the Tasmanian Heritage Festival, which this year had as its theme, 'Innovation and Invention'. In keeping with this focus, we decided on a walking tour of the site, held on Sunday 27 May 2012. The tour highlighted some of the innovations associated with Precinct throughout its history, including *Wingfield*. The Sanatorium chalets were opened for inspection.

The Friends of the Orphan Schools has always been interested in the precinct as a whole and for some time members have been concerned about the long-term survival of the two sanatorium chalets from the former Tasmanian Consumptive Sanatorium. The chalets now sit in the grounds of the St John's Precinct between Karingal and the former Parsonage. Late last year, we were given permission to undertake conservation work on the chalets. Heritage architect Robert Vincent, who has had a long-standing commitment to the site, compiled a Conservation Management Plan for the chalets, which has been approved by Heritage Tasmania and the Department of Health and Human Service, who own the huts. We are indebted to Robert for sharing his expertise and passion for the site in this practical way. We are also extremely grateful to Simon Cocker for taking on the role of Project Manager. He will provide a more detailed report to this meeting and you can follow progress of the works on the chalets in our newsletter

We have held two General Meetings through the year, on Thursday, 8 March and Thursday, 3 May; both meetings have been well attended. In March, Robert Vincent provided an intriguing overview of some early maps and images of Hobart Town. This meeting also provided a forum for preliminary discussion about conservation

work on the Sanatorium chalets. At the May meeting, Professor Lucy Frost gave a paper entitled "Whose children? The early years of the King's Orphan Schools." This paper looked back to the early days of Van Diemen's Land when Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur struggled with the problem of how best to protect the colony's children.

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. This year, I received notification that the application was unsuccessful. However, the Group will continue to advocate for national recognition of the site. We will also continue to advocate for basic conservation works and public access for the North and South Wings.

I think I may have said this in every Annual Report but it is still valid. This is our only fifth year and in that 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 2012.

Dianne Snowden  
Convenor  
19 August 2012

- *The Blackfriar 1851*: Vol.32 No.1, p.9
- *The Tasmania (2) 1845*: Vol.32 No.2, p.99  
[[www.tasfhs.org/TasAncArticleV32N1.htm](http://www.tasfhs.org/TasAncArticleV32N1.htm)]
- *Mary Cullen and the Neva*: Vol.32 No.3, p.140  
[[www.tasfhs.org/TasAncArticleV32N3.htm](http://www.tasfhs.org/TasAncArticleV32N3.htm)]
- *The Leathley Children*: Vol.32 No.4, p.216
- *Isabella Jones formerly Forbes*