



**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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**6<sup>th</sup> Annual Report 18 August 2013**

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It is an honour to present the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Report of the Friends of the Orphan Schools, St John's Park Precinct.

It is now six years since the Friends of the Orphan Schools, 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 are included on the National Trust of Australia (Tasmania) website and have been included in National Trust publicity throughout the year.

At the Annual General Meeting held on 19 August 2012, we elected the following Committee for the 2012-2013 year:

Convenor: Dianne Snowden

Deputy Convenor: Toni Sherwood

General Secretary: Andrew Cocker

Minute Secretary: Lorraine Davidson

Treasurer: Simon Cocker

Assistant Treasurer: Roger Stott

Committee Members: Bernadette Bell, Peter Gaggin, David Lewis, Joyce Purtscher

St John's Church (ex-officio): David Featherstone

New Town Primary School (ex-officio): Di Smith

John Hunter kindly acted as Returning Officer.

Throughout the year, your Committee once again has worked indefatigably on your behalf. I thank them all very much for their energy and enthusiasm. 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, assisted by Roger Stott. Simon is also our photographer; his photographic record of our activities and of the site is invaluable. With

his assistance, we have also updated our selection of photographic cards.

Andrew Cocker continues to wear many hats on our Committee: as Secretary, Membership Secretary, Hall Manager and Web Manager. I am continually amazed at his capacity for hard work. Andrew conscientiously maintains our website. The 'Find an Orphan' facility continues to generate interest and is a significant factor in raising our profile. This time last year I reported that more **than 200 people** had claimed orphans. This now stands at **668**, more than one in ten orphans claimed. As many of you are aware, this facility is based on the work of Joyce Purtscher, who generously provided information which she compiled over many years of painstaking research.

Andrew has redeveloped and upgraded our website to meet current standards and to ensure it works well with the latest browsers. He has also strengthened security measures and made it easier for people wanting to update their claim if they have discovered an error or further information as their research continues. We do encourage you to add and share further information because it enriches our story and ultimately strengthens our claims for the social and cultural significance of the Orphan Schools and St John's Park Precinct. We are particularly pleased to now have over 20 photos of orphans and/or their families.

Andrew also maintains our membership records. We currently have 65 financial members. I would urge all of you who are not financial to renew as soon as possible. The greater our membership numbers, the stronger our advocacy voice.

Committee member Peter Gaggin has been working on developing overlay maps of the site, starting with the earliest found, to help in understanding the historical development of the site. As well, he is a member of the dedicated Chalet Renovation team, which also includes Project Manager Simon Cocker, Brian Webberley and Bob Vincent. If you haven't seen their work, I encourage you to visit the site.

Lorraine Davidson does a sterling job with the minutes and with Bernadette Bell works on our education and schools programs. Bernadette also organises our Publicity. Both are extremely reliable and conscientious, and I thank them both.

David Lewis, recently retired, joined the committee last year and has been invaluable in strengthening our relationship with St John's Church.

Our successful excursion program has continued. Late in 2012, I conducted a tour of the precinct for several Hobart City Council aldermen, who were all very impressed with the history of the site. Our tour guides have expanded to include Andrew, Bernadette and Lorraine. If you would like to help, we can provide training. 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 a tireless worker for the Friends of the Orphan School and we are indebted to her and appreciative of all the work she does.

It is with regret that I announce that Joyce has decided not to continue on the Committee. Joyce and Rosie Davidson were two of our early Committee members and both were instrumental in establishing the

Memorial Garden and Plaques. On 24 February, at our annual Fox's Feast celebration, we presented Joyce with our first Life Membership. We wish her all the best.

Fox's Feast Celebrations for 2013, held on 24 February, focused on the dedication of the Memorial Garden for the children who died while at the Orphan Schools. The completion of the Memorial Garden and Plaques project occurred on 21 October with the unveiling, by Lord Mayor Damon Thomas, of three memorial plaques bearing the names of just over four hundred who died while at the Orphan Schools. This was made possible by the generous donations of a number of people including

A & M Porteous  
Colleen Read  
Elise Archer MP  
Maurice Appleyard  
Brian Mansfield  
Aileen Ashford  
Andrew Cocker  
Kerry Sherston & Matthew Smith  
Simon Cocker  
Lucy Frost  
Berry Dunston  
Sue Collins  
Shirley Kerin and family.

Another generous donation, of a St John's Medal, was given by Wendy Mitchell.

The Research and Publications Group went into recess when Convenor Toni Sherwood moved to Melbourne. We miss Toni's commitment to the site, her wide-ranging skills and common sense approach. Chris

Leppard has volunteered to take on the role of Convenor of the Research and Publications Group. Our most recent publication is Joyce Purtscher's *Deaths at the New Town Charitable Institution, July 1895-December 1912*, available for \$15.00. As already mentioned, we have also updated our selection of photographic cards.

From Melbourne and Devonport, 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.

*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 have been adapted, with permission, from the stories which appear on our website. The forthcoming article is about an orphan school boy named Edward Deans. During the 175th anniversary celebrations at St John's Church at New Town, I met an older gentleman, who proudly told me that his grandfather was an orphan school boy and that he was buried at St John's. At first I thought he meant his great-grandfather but he then explained that he was the youngest son of the youngest son of the Orphan School boy's second marriage. It was a chance encounter with a great outcome.

It has been a busy and active twelve months, with a number of events and activities. One of the most unusual was the SBS story, 'Who do you think you are?' which briefly featured the Orphan School. Focus of the program, actor Lex Marinos, discovered that his ancestor arrived on the

*Princess Royal*, which ran aground at Frederick Henry Bay. The women were temporarily housed in the recently-completed southern wing of the Orphan School. Much of the research relating to this part of the program was supplied by member Thelma McKay. You can find more information about the *Princess Royal* women in Thelma's book, *The Princess Royal girls: the first free female immigration ship to Van Diemen's Land - 1832*.

At the conclusion of the Annual General Meeting last year, Sue Newitt presented a summary of her 2011 UTAS Honours Thesis, 'Aboriginal Children in the Orphan Schools'. Her exhaustive research identified a number of Aboriginal children at the Orphan Schools.

In April, Elaine Crisp presented 'Going Behind the Clock: A History of Aged Care at the Orphan Schools Site'. She detailed the development of the site's aged care facilities from the opening of the New Town Charitable Institution in 1879 following the closure of the Orphan Schools. In 1930, the New Town Charitable Institution became the New Town Rest Home and then finally St John's Park in 1937. Elaine's talk was based on her recently completed UTAS PhD thesis, 'In Safe hands: A History of Aged Care in Tasmania'. We are particularly grateful to Elaine and her husband who drove from Launceston. Southern Cross Care provided a delicious and generous afternoon tea and we extend our thanks to them.

Recently, the Committee was privileged to be shown through the Infants Orphan School building, now owned by Southern Cross Care. Again, we extend our thanks to Southern Cross Care and look forward to working with them more closely in the future.

Throughout the year, St John's Church celebrated 175 years since it was consecrated. Our group contributed much-appreciated advice and the practical setting up of an historical display in the Church. In May, members, some of whom wore period costume, conducted talks and guided tours of the church. Well over 100 people availed themselves of the opportunity of seeing inside the church, describing the tours as a most rewarding event. Several members of the St John's Church congregation who attended said that they had no idea of the richness and history of the building. One of the visitors attended Sunday School in this building and she was able to share her memories with us. The St John's Church organising committee expressed their thanks to the Friends group for contributing to these significant aspects of the celebrations.

Our tours and talks program has continued throughout the year. Andrew visited the Bridgewater School for Seniors and Lorraine spoke to its Glenorchy counterpart. Joyce has spoken to a number of groups. In August Joyce and Andrew showed a group from the Hobart Town First Settlers Association around the site. In September Joyce led a tour for the Trefoil Guides, which included an inspection of the recent renovations the chalets. Lorraine shared her love of the site with the Miniatures group. Thank-you to all those who help out on these occasions, especially Joyce, Andrew, Bernadette and Lorraine.

On 24 March 2013, members of the Friends group visited the Cascades Female Factory to participate in a special performance of *Her Story*, the creation of Judith and Chris Cornish. It was a moving tribute to the

convict women, many of whom were mothers of the Orphan School children. The dramatisation was followed by a mini tour of the site and refreshments provided by the Female Factory Historic Site.

In May, we again participated in the Tasmanian Heritage Festival, with a site tour.

I know I say this in every Annual Report but it is still a pertinent message. This is only our sixth 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 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 over the next year.

Dianne Snowden  
Convenor  
18 August 2013