



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

9th Annual Report 7 August 2016

It is now nine years since I founded the Friends of the Orphan Schools, St John's Park Precinct, at a public meeting held in St John's Church, New Town on 14 December 2007. The aims that we identified in our first year have not changed and remain 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.

Many more members of the community, in Tasmania and beyond, are now aware of the existence of the Orphan School buildings and their history. An important part of the Friends' work is promoting awareness of the site and our activities as well as undertaking research about the site.

In August 2015, we elected the following Committee for the 2015-2016 year:

Convenor	Dianne Snowden
Deputy Convenor	Vacant
Secretary	Andrew Cocker
Minutes Secretary	Sue Newitt
Membership Officer	Deb Norris
Treasurer	Simon Cocker
Assistant Treasurer	David Lewis
Public Officer	Simon Cocker
Web Manager	Andrew Cocker

Hall Manager	Andrew Cocker
Committee Members:	Bernadette Bell
	Berry Dunston (<i>Kickstart</i> liaison)
	Peter Gaggin
Research & Publications Committee	Dianne Snowden, Bernadette Bell, Jo Brodie, Deb Norris

Special Interest Groups

Descendants of Orphans, convenor	vacant
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Ex-officio members

St John's Church	Rev. Bill Stewart
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Ogilvie High School	vacant
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New Town Primary School	Di Smith
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We were pleased to welcome Bruce Lindsay to the Committee as Newsletter Editor. His first newsletter was well-received and we thank him for his hard work. Simon Cocker was elected Treasurer in December 2009. He has decided to retire from this position but has nominated for Deputy-Convenor for the coming year.

A highlight of the year has been the completion of conservation work on the Sanatorium Chalets under the guidance of Project Manager, Simon Cocker, and with several volunteers, including Peter Gaggin and Robert Vincent. We were grateful to receive assistance from Fairbrother Pty. Ltd and the Department of Health and Human Services. Member June Joiner organised the donation of furniture and other items for the chalet from the Nurses' Museum. We are currently working on interpretive panels and the garden surrounding the Chalets, based on a plan created by Ruth Mollison. The Chalets will be opened by Her Excellency Professor the Honourable Kate Warner, AM, Governor of Tasmania at 2.00 pm on Saturday 10 September 2016. Thank-you to all those involved with this outstanding project.

Fox's Feast was held on 28 February 2016, once again providing an opportunity for descendants of orphans to gather and share stories. Some of these stories have been published in the newsletter. As some of you may now, I regularly write stories under the heading 'Voice from the Orphan Schools' which are published in *Tasmanian Ancestry*, the journal of the Tasmanian Family History Society. As well, a significant number of orphans have been claimed on our website. Thank-you to Andrew for his work on the website and the Orphans database. The Orphans' Memorial Garden is conscientiously maintained by Joyce and Joe Purtscher, and I thank them both for their hard work.

On Sunday 8 May 2016, we participated in the Open Day at the Cascades Female Factory and received a number of family history queries relating to the Orphan School. Thank-you to Andrew, Simon, and Deb who sat with me in the freezing cold!

The Research and Publications Group has worked steadily throughout the year. Convenor Christine Leppard-Quinn resigned for family reasons and two new members, Deborah Norris and Jo Brodie, joined Bernadette Bell and me on the committee. The Committee has undertaken a number of research queries, helped Simon Cocker with his publication on the

sanatorium chalets and has begun inserting additional information to the Orphan Database. In July, we welcomed visitors Sharon Feckrat, Thomas Polascik (both from Duke University) and their children Breanna and Bryce Polascik. As part of their visit to Hobart, they volunteered to undertake some research for the Friends of the Orphan Schools. With the help of the Research Committee, they extracted information from the *Reports of Crime* (later known as the *Tasmanian Police Gazette*), searching for references to the Orphan Schools and the New Town Charitable Institution. We spent a memorable few hours with them and greatly appreciate their enthusiasm. Thank-you to Chris, Bernadette, Deb and Jo for your valuable contribution to the Research Committee.

Members visited *Markree* on 18 October. Thank-you to Andrew Cocker for organising this.

We participated in the Institute of Architects Open House scheme on 7 November. Thank-you to Simon Cocker, Joyce Purtscher, Bernadette Bell and Deborah Norris for their help on the day.

A number of tours have been undertaken throughout the year, including a group of thirty New Zealanders, descendants of convict Timothy Teahan and convict Catherine Brett, who lived on the site. Other tours included professional historians attending their national meeting in Hobart in September, and the Hobart Probus Club in November. Thank-you to all those who have helped with the tours especially David Lewis for his church talks, David Featherstone for his musical contribution and Bernadette Bell for regularly providing afternoon tea.

I thought I would share this feedback with you from a tour participant in September:

I just wanted to thank you again for a lovely afternoon on Sunday at the Orphan School. You and Bernadette made our visit very memorable, Michael has not stopped referring to the plight of the convict women and the children. Family history usually bores him like mad!

Special thanks to Joyce Purtscher who has stepped in when our tour guide has been unavailable. It is no secret that we need more volunteer guides and so we are pleased to welcome today Robyn Everist from Hobart Walking Tours. Robyn has generously offered to undertake tour guide training for us and will speak briefly at the end of the AGM after our Guest Speaker, Associate Professor Stefan Petrow.

Simon Cocker and I met with Hugh Tassell and Tim Swann from GHD about the preliminary findings of the burial ground survey. Tim said that it was one of the largest projects of this type that they had undertaken. He had walked 50 kms on the site. Although the survey results have been complicated by dumping of topsoil, 26 sites with human remains were discovered and there are likely to be more. The Roman Catholic burial ground, where many orphans were buried, was not included at this stage. Hugh plans to continue the project through the University of Tasmania. We are currently trying to organise a meeting for those interested in the findings of the preliminary report.

To the Committee, members and supporters, thank-you all very much for your support and hard work. I look forward to continuing to work with you over the next twelve months.

It gives me great pleasure to present the 9th Annual Report of the Friends of the Orphan Schools, St John's Park Precinct.

Dianne Snowden (Convenor)

7 August 2016