



FRIENDS OF THE ORPHAN SCHOOLS

St John's Park Precinct New Town Tasmania

Issue 15

Newsletter

October 2012

Lord Mayor to unveil Memorial Plaques

The Friends of the Orphan Schools are delighted to announce that the three plaques bearing the names of all those children who died while at the Orphan Schools between 1828 and 1879 will be unveiled by the Lord Mayor of Hobart, Damon Thomas at 11.00 a.m. on Sunday 21 October. Members are cordially invited to attend this ceremony which will be followed by light refreshments in the Old Sunday School.

Restoration of Sanatorium Chalets – Help Wanted

For some time, the Friends of the Orphan Schools Committee, has been very concerned about the two wooden buildings that have sat in the grounds of St John's Park Precinct between Karingal and the former Parsonage. The two buildings—the Alan Rogers Chalet and the Rechabite chalet—are distinguished by contrasting size and details. The Alan Rogers Chalet is a fine example of a small wooden building and has quite detailed finishes while the other is much plainer and of more basic construction. Both were designed to have north facing verandahs and large opening doors to allow a free flow of fresh air—considered important for consumptives at the time. Features of the Alan Rogers Chalet include filials, King Billy

Pine walls and a detailed ceiling. It was described in the media of the time as 'a chalet for one patient with a dressing room attached'.

The buildings were constructed in 1906 as part of the Tasmanian Consumptive Sanatorium. At its peak the site included a hospital, a nurses' home and some thirty chalets. Of those thirty chalets these are the only two which survive; both designed by Rudolph Koch, they are a lasting reminder of this period and of national heritage significance.

Both buildings have been in desperate need of some conservation and a little restoration work. Heritage architect, Robert Vincent prepared a conservation plan that was approved by Heritage Tasmania. The work aims to do as much as necessary and as little as possible to keep these building preserved. Initial work is now well underway and will ultimately include preparation and painting of the external walls and rooves, replacement of rotted timbers, repair and reinstatement of a damaged filial, replacement of the lost verandas. Planning has also commenced to lift both buildings into new positions on new, secure footings to reflect their north facing character and separation.

Our treasurer Simon Cocker agreed to manage this exciting project and work got underway in

early August and work has been proceeding steadily over the last few months. Simon, along with Robert Vincent and Brian Webberley, have worked together most Sunday mornings to progress the project. They have been recently joined by Kim Behrens and on a couple of occasions a group of students from Hobart College have provided enthusiastic assistance.

The progress of these conservation works is being progressively documented on our website and can be viewed at

<http://www.orphanschool.org.au/chalet%20project.htm>.

Helpers Wanted

The team would be very pleased to receive a little extra help to bring this project to completion. Working Bees are usually held on Sunday mornings between 10 and 12. If you can spare an hour or two on Sunday morning and would like to be involved then please do contact Simon Cocker for details on 0419 402377.

Annual General Meeting

This year our Annual General Meeting was held on Sunday 19 August at 2.00 p.m. in the Old Sunday School. Twenty-one members attended the meeting. The Convenor, Dianne Snowden read her Annual Report and Treasurer Simon Cocker presented

Financial Statements for 2011/12. Dianne also presented a floral arrangement on behalf of the Committee to outgoing Minute Secretary Colleen Read.

The following Office-Bearers and Committee Members were elected for 2012/13:

Convenor: Dianne Snowden

Deputy Convenor: Toni Sherwood

General Secretary: Andrew Cocker

Treasurer: Simon Cocker

Minute Secretary: Lorraine Davidson

Committee Members: Joyce Purtscher, Lorraine Davidson (Minute Secretary), Bernadette Bell, Peter Gaggin and David Lewis.

Following these proceedings Sue Newitt gave a very interesting and informative paper entitled **‘Aboriginal Children in the Orphan Schools.’** It was based on research for her 2011 Honours thesis at the University of Tasmania. Her exhaustive archival research identified a number of Aboriginal children. In her presentation she spoke about the high death rate of Aboriginal children in care; attempts to inculcate ‘white’ customs at the expense of indigenous culture and the ill-fated removal of the children from Wybalena, Flinders’ Island to Oyster Cove.

Have you renewed your membership?

Your continued financial membership of the Friends of the Orphan School is important to us as tangible evidence of your support for our work and a clear demonstration of community interest in the Precinct. We currently have just over 80 financial members for 2013. If you have not renewed your membership for 2013 please consider doing so as soon as possible. Visit our website at <http://www.orphanschool.org.au/> and follow the links for membership renewal (RHS of page).

Recent Tours and Talks

In recent weeks members of our group have been very busy with tours of the precinct and a number of talks in the community. Andrew has visited the Bridgewater School for Seniors to speak about the Orphan School Precinct and Lorraine spoke with Glenorchy School for Seniors on Thursday morning 3 October. On 21 August Joyce and Andrew showed a group from the First Settlers Association around the site and on Sunday 30 September Joyce led another tour for the Trefoil Guides. Joyce submitted the following report:

Luckily, Sunday 30 September was a finer day than the day before, and the 20 or so people from the Trefoil groups enjoyed their walk through the precinct and their inspection of St John’s Church. They had been looking forward to seeing the church and hearing the organ, but David Featherstone told them that the organ was being repaired and restored in Melbourne. David told them about the history of the church before some of the visitors pretended to be convicts and some orphans when they scaled the narrow steps into the balconies.

Andrew Cocker proudly showed them the recent renovations on the Sanatorium chalets. They’re looking much ‘healthier’—congratulations to the planners and workers! Trefoil provided the food for afternoon tea and bought some of our booklets after hearing more about the orphanage.

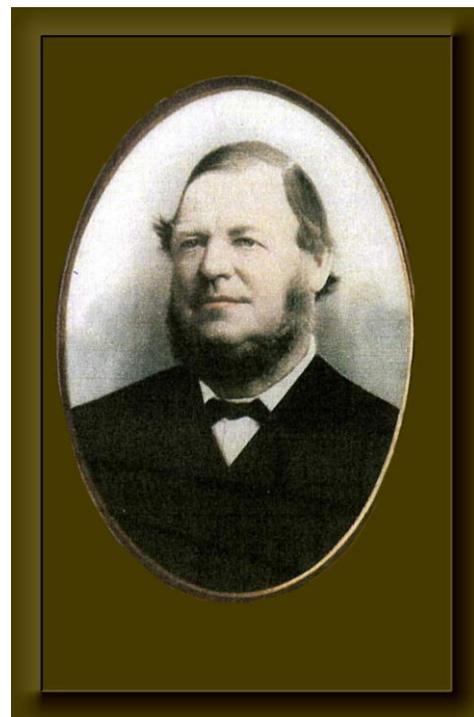
Thanks also to Lorraine and Bernadette for their help.

Find an Orphan

The *Find an Orphan* page on our website continues to generate a lot of interest and so far more than 400 children from the Schools have been claimed.

We are pleased to be able to present one of the many stories that have been added to the site.

Michele Benson has contributed the following story about her ancestor Robert Wiggins (Orphan Number 5655). Michelle has very kindly given permission for us to include it in this newsletter.



Robert Wiggins (1826-1899)

Robert Barter Wiggins was born in Brighton, Sussex England on 14 July 1826. At the age of 8 years he boarded the ship *Strathfieldsaye* with his mother, Mary Wiggins (Bishop) and his two sisters, Jane (15years) and Martha, and brother James and left England for Australia, to be with his father James who had been transported to Van Diemen’s Land (Tasmania) in 1831. Robert and his family arrived in Van Diemen’s Land in August 1834.

Shortly after his arrival, on 29 August 1834 Robert was placed at the Queens Orphan School at New Town for 8 months, and discharged to his parents on 23 April 1835. By this time his father had received his ticket-of-leave.

On 29 June 1847, Robert, aged 21, married Mary Ann Elizabeth Adams in the Bethesda Chapel South Hobart.

Robert held his 1st publican’s license at the age of 27. He was licensee of the *Bricklayer’s Arms*

(later known as *Sir William Don*) from 1853–1862; the *Steam Navigation Hotel* corner Bathurst and Elizabeth Streets (now Mountain Designs) from 1866 until 1869; *Builder's Hotel*, Bathurst Street (now *New Sydney*) between 1869 and 1876 and the *Ocean Child* from 1881 until 1898. A photo of Robert and his family is on the wall of the *Ocean Child* to this day.

Robert was also a builder and contractor and built many public and private buildings in and around Hobart. Some include the New Town Public School (1860); Wesleyan Church, New Town (now the Uniting Church, corner Main Road and Cross Streets); the Molle Street Bridge; the Grandstand at the Elwick Racecourse; the Macquarie River Bridge, Campbell Town, parts of the Launceston Gaol; additions to the convent now attached to St Joseph's Catholic Church. In 1861 he also built the Infants Orphan School and erected new cells at the Hobart Gaol. Robert built and owned 'Georgina Cottage', still standing opposite Hobart College at 68 Warwick Street.

Robert and Mary Ann Eliza had 12 children. Robert died in Hobart 1899. He was buried at old St John's Cemetery, New Town with his wife, his eldest son, George William, their young daughter Eliza. The head stones were later moved to Cornelian Bay Cemetery.

Interestingly, when John Fox died in 1861 and left the sum of 500 pounds for the children of the Queen's Asylum, Robert's father, James Barter Wiggins and a Mr H Whitely were named in his will as the trustees of this money. They invested the money wisely and the interest earned enabled the picnic to continue from 1863–1879.

James Wiggins would organise for the children to stop off outside his hotel (*Wiggins' Hotel* corner Murray and Collins Street) to hear

the bands play on their way to their picnics. James would then accompany the children and rally others to provide transport for them in horse and carts.

New Publication

The following publication is available for purchase for \$15.00: *Deaths at the New Town Charitable Institution, July 1895 - December 1912*. This thirty-nine page book compiled by Joyce Purtscher and published by the Friends of the Orphan Schools provides access to previously obscure records and is an invaluable resource for family historians and researchers. Please see our website for details of purchase.

Calendar of Events 2012/13

11:00 a.m. Sunday 21 October 2012: Unveiling of Memorial Plaques (please see page 1 for details)

1.30 – 4.00 p.m. Sunday 28 October 2012: Open afternoon and precinct tour (2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.)

2.00 – 4.00 p.m. Sunday 25 November 2012: Open afternoon

Sunday 24 February 2013: Fox's Feast

April 2013: General Member Meeting (details to be confirmed)

1:30 – 4:00 p.m. Sunday 28 April 2013: Open afternoon and precinct tour (2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.)

Sunday 18 August 2013: AGM

September 2013: Wattle Day Celebrations

Details of all events will be confirmed and updated on our website as necessary.

The Committee meets on the second Wednesday of each month in the Old Sunday School at 5:30 p.m.

Tours

Group walking tours of the Orphan Schools and St John's Park Precinct can be arranged by negotiation, minimum ten persons.

The tour includes a visit to St John's Church and a short organ recital (subject to availability of church). Learn about the site and its history from one of our tour guides: Joyce Purtscher, well known for her work on the children in the Orphan Schools and paupers, or Dianne Snowden our convenor and historian.

\$10 donation towards notes and afternoon tea.

Email the secretary at secretary@orphanschool.org.au or phone Joyce on 03 6234 1392 to enquire about a tour of our fascinating site.

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