



FRIENDS OF THE ORPHAN SCHOOLS

St John's Park Precinct New Town Tasmania

Issue 25

NEWSLETTER

September 2016

Diary Notes

Saturday 10th September 2016

The Sanatorium Chalets will be officially opened by Her Excellency the Governor of Tasmania, Professor the Honourable Kate Warner AM, at 2.00pm. Invitations have been forwarded to Friends.

Sunday 23 October 2016

Female Convicts Research Centre Seminar on the theme *Prologue: Women's lives before transportation*. Papers will explore women's lives before transportation in three sessions: social background, groups of offenders, and unusual crimes. The Seminar will be held at the Hobart Town Hall in Macquarie Street, Hobart. Registration is essential via www.femaleconvicts.org.au/index.php/frcr-seminars/seminar-registration

Sunday 22 February 2017

Mark your diaries. World-class concert organist, Thomas Heywood, will present a recital on the fine 1886 Hill & Son organ in St John's Anglican Church, New Town, commencing at 2.00pm. Admission will be \$25 (\$20 for concession-holders), and tickets will be available at the door. These concerts are usually very well attended, and early arrival is recommended.

9th AGM Report 2016

Our new committee was elected at the AGM held on Sunday 7 August 2016:

Convenor: Dianne Snowden
 Deputy Convenor: Simon Cocker
 Secretary: Andrew Cocker
 Minutes Secretary: Sue Newitt
 Treasurer: Jo Brodie
 Assistant Treasurer: David Lewis
 Membership Secretary: Deborah Norris
 Public Officer: Simon Cocker
 Web Manager: Andrew Cocker
 Hall Manager: Andrew Cocker
 Committee Members: Bernadette Bell; Berry Dunston (*Kickstart Arts liaison*); Peter Gaggin; June Joiner; David Lewis
 Research & Publications Committee: Dianne Snowden; Bernadette Bell; Jo Brodie; Deborah Norris
 Newsletter Editor: Bruce Lindsay
 Ex-officio members:
 St John's Church: Rev. Bill Stewart
 Ogilvie High School: vacant
 New Town Primary School: Di Smith
 New Town High School: vacant

Guest speaker at the AGM was Associate Professor Stefan Petrow from the University of Tasmania, who spoke with great insight about the life of Edward Swarbreck Hall (1805-1881), a

medical practitioner and public health advocate who played a prominent role at the Orphan Schools. With Carey Denholm, Associate Professor Petrow has written a book about Hall, titled *Dr. Edward Swarbreck Hall: Colonial Medical Scientist and Moral Activist*. It will be released in October by Australian Scholarly Publishing: the 'blurb' for the book states:

Dr Edward Swarbreck Hall was a thorn in the side of the Establishment of Van Diemen's Land. For nearly fifty years after his arrival in 1833 he clashed with doctors, administrators, politicians and the clergy.

As a doctor he protected the inmates of the convict system, the Cascades Female Factory and the Queen's Orphan Asylum from oppression and mistreatment. He agitated for the protection of the public from infectious diseases and their vaccination against smallpox, and he defended Catholics and Catholicism from sectarian attack by Protestant critics. But he was also a pioneer epidemiologist of international repute, a perceptive shipboard diarist and a devoted father and husband.

This book resurrects the many-sided life of a colonial doctor who, with great moral courage and passion, renounced the pursuit of private gain and strove tirelessly for the benefit of the sick and powerless.

Completion of the Sanatorium Chalets restoration project

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 in September.

Simon Cocker's booklet on the sanatorium chalets has been printed and will be available for sale in September.

Visitors from USA

In July 2016, 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 (Bernadette, Deb and Jo), they extracted information from the *Reports of Crime* (later known as the *Tasmanian Police Gazette*), searching for references to the Orphan Schools (later the Queen's Asylum for Destitute Children) and the New Town Charitable Institution (later St John's Park Hospital, closed 1994). We spent a memorable few hours with them and greatly appreciate their enthusiasm.

Some snippets from what they found:

Reports of Crime; February 3, 1882; No. 1176; p.19: INFORMATION is requested by the Superintendent Police, New Norfolk, of the whereabouts of *Benjamin Grill*, who left New Norfolk a week before Christmas last to go to Mr. Ballantyne's, Upper Huon, and has not since been heard of. *Description*—20 years of age, has been an Orphan School apprentice, a native; his mother resides at New Norfolk. [NB: Benjamin Grill, son of Elizabeth (Grady) and Benjamin Grill, was admitted to the Orphan School in 1868 and was discharged in 1875].

Police Gazette; March 15, 1901; No. 2173; p.57: INQUIRY is made for *John and Thomas Partington*; the former was apprenticed to Mr. Ryan, shoemaker, at Oatlands, from the Queen's Orphan School, New Town, about 1850; the latter, to a Mrs. Barrett, baker, Argyle-street, Hobart, from the same institution, and about the same time. Inquiry at the instance of their brother, James Partington, of Cobaw, near Lancefield, Victoria.

The family's research provides an insight into the post-orphan school life of the Orphan School children as well as information about those employed on site. Apart from Joyce Purtscher's publication, *Deaths at the New Town Charitable Institution July 1895-December 1913*, our research into the New Town Charitable Institu-

tion, to date, has been minimal and so it is great to have made a start on this, thanks to the generosity of our visitors.

Dianne Snowden

Cabotia 1834 to Queen's Orphan School Genealogy, germ or gem?

Like many before me, my mother's death more than twenty years ago was a catalyst for family discovery. She had told me, but I failed to listen of course. She told me fanciful tales, the fabric of all family fantasy, I fear. Yet she hadn't tapped the rich seam that my archivist cousin calls 'the gateway forebear'. This one gold-seam link provides my family with over forty generations back to 100BC in Ireland; DNA, historical misinterpretation and reinterpretation aside of course. My children don't feign uninterest; their lack of interest is genuine. But all this means that I will never be bored because of the access to documents through the Internet.

But tracing my father's family is remarkably frustrating because of my lost women. Not at the Queens Orphan School, Hobart, but certainly by way of it. My great grandfather, James Martin Sinclair (1847-1902), was born in Taralga, NSW. His marriage certificate asserts his mother was Lousia [sic] Nicholson. That wee assertion took a decade to unravel. The name was almost correct but the second assertion was that his father was James Sinclair and a spidery family hand from the early 1900s laid out the family so conveniently, but so inconveniently incorrect. His father was Thomas Sinker from Cheshire - and I have been called 'Sinkers' forever - not James Sinclair from Edinburgh. So simple because Sinker changed his name to Sinclair, but how a son could have his father's name so wrong makes genealogical studies a house of cards. It says many other things too. In sum, the certificate had both parents' names

wrong. I can find no evidence of the death of Ann Honor Louisa Sinclair, his mother - nee Nicholson - from Ireland. One day I may!

My great grandmother was Florence McKay, who came to Taralga from Victoria; all easily thrown up. Florence's mother was Martha Sproul who was born at sea on the *Cabotia* in 1834 on the voyage from Liverpool to Hobart. Her father, Thomas, died in Hobart after a few years, leaving her mother, Phoebe (or Phebe) with a number of small children: Ann (1832-1836); Martha (1834-1913); Ann (1837-?) Elizabeth (1840-1919) and Thomas William (1843-1845). My first thought when I found the Sproul children in the Queen's Orphanage was that Phoebe deserted them. I thought she had become a lady of the night. Awkwardly, she left me thinking that for a few years, and then I found that she was working at the orphanage. Life was tough clearly - look at those dates - and I doubt that I'll ever know what drove the decision of Thomas Sproul (1804?-1842) and Phoebe (Holmes) (1809?-1880) to migrate to Hobart. They weren't convicts and I think Phoebe, at least, came from Pettigo(e), County Donegal, Ireland, an interesting town because the western side of the main street is in Donegal and the east in County Fermanagh; one in Eire, the other in Northern Ireland, so why do I write Donegal? The answer is 'I don't know!' That investigation is another blank slate.

Thomas Sproul died in 1842. Great great grandmother Martha was about to turn eight and was the oldest then of three. The only boy, Thomas William, was born after his father's death but died in the orphanage in 1845. Martha became part of the orphanage on 11 March, 1843 (admission number 5118 itself speaks loudly). She left on 27 June, 1845, a month short of her eleventh birthday, and she married James A McKay at Woodside in eastern Victoria (near Sale) on 7 February, 1850.

What she did in the intervening years is another blank. She died in Kempsey, NSW, on 10 May, 1913, in her mid-seventies. She was living with or near her second daughter, Alice Anne, who married Thomas Joseph McMahon Parker, a NSW policeman. Sadly her older daughter, Florence, my Florence, is lost and undiscoverable to me. I fear the very worst because my great grandfather deserted her and their many children, leading to the point where I believe their youngest daughter was baptised in the Goulburn Presbyterian Church as Ethel Sinclair in 1889, but neither her birth nor death was formally registered in that name. She was probably out there for a lifetime under another Presbyterian name. Three of her youngest brothers were taken into care. Genealogy is a germ.

Finally, my Phoebe, my third great grandmother. I have always loved that name. Phoebe remarried in Hobart, to Edward Simon Arnett, no real relative but a most interesting man. He and his sister were arrested for counterfeiting coins in England, from which it seems they had done very well. One in chains on the bottom deck to Hobart and the other to Sydney, then Taralga. Phoebe had a second family: Isabelle Phoebe Arnett (1847-1903) and Fanny Arnett (1849-1924). There is evidence of these Arnett girls being in Taralga, and there are many Arnett families in Tasmania - they were prominent in Bothwell - and along the north and south coasts of NSW.

I sense Edward Simon Arnett was a maintenance man at the Queens Orphanage, and there is much evidence that his first family including his first wife - Elizabeth Wilkinson (1807-1841) - came to Tasmania. Edward's flamboyant sister, Isabella Matilda Arnett - when arrested insisted having a final play on the piano prior to being carted off, and many years later was postmistress of Taralga.

As a non-relative I love her story and there are many, many side stories to this tale that all came alive

for me from finding the Sprouls at the Queens Orphanage, Hobart.

I walked those grounds, peered in available corners but none of my mysteries were resolved. They can rest in peace, as gems of my genealogy.

Ian Sinclair Wagga Wagga, NSW

Orphans and Silkworms – An Unlikely Partnership

Spurred by a recent piece in *The Mercury Weekend* by Hilary Burden, the story of proposals – that children in the Orphan Schools at New Town grow mulberry trees, and produce silk from silkworms fed on their leaves – may interest the Friends. Particularly in the early years of the Tasmanian colony, there were frequent calls from London to reduce operating costs on the British Treasury, and improve local production to sustain the growing population, and preferably gain income from sales. Recall that Norfolk Island was settled as much for its native flax (used for making ships' sails) as for its suitability as a penal colony.

Reported in *The Mercury* of Monday, 6 January, 1862, was a paper presented to the Royal Society in Hobart, by one J J Stutzer, titled 'Silk Husbandry in Tasmania'. The then-Governor, Colonel Sir Thomas Gore-Browne, was in the audience, to hear of 'those essential circumstances which favor (sic) or oppose the establishment of silk growing in Tasmania as a source of direct national profit'. Stutzer's motives in exploring the proposal were thus abundantly clear.

Given then-current world prices for raw silk, he estimated that from 30 acres of ground at the New Town site, 3000 pounds of silk could be produced annually for an input of about £200, worth 'according to its quality, from £3000 to £5000' or 'if the quality prove very superior, be worth nearly £8000'. These were enormous figures at the time, consider-

ing that we know for 1843 the total operating costs for the orphanage were £5927.15/-. (*Stutzer was an academic and a barrister, trained in London, who became a University lecturer and Inspector of Schools in Tasmania. He was also a confidant of the then-Governor, and his name appears as one of the original Trustees of the Fox Bequest which funded 'Fox's Feast' from 1862.*)

In her work *Heritage Trees Across Tasmania* Vol 1, Gwenda Sheridan says (pp. 79-80) 'The Church of England parsonage was built in 1837. Close by, the government had resumed land and established another farm, later operated as the Orphan School Farm. The site of the present Clare Street oval and Ogilvie High School and grounds were parts of this farm. The farm consisted of 100 acres, 50 of which were under cultivation. By 1861 the farm comprising 139 acres was under the direct control of the Orphan School and a Farming Committee'.

While it may have been intended that the School Farm produce fresh food for the inmates, the then Inspector of Schools, Charles Bradbury, in his report on life at the schools in August, 1848, said 'Not one of the boys is employed in farming or gardening ...but, instead, six hired labourers and a paid overseer [are employed]' Yet Stutzer still enthused to the Royal Society that "The expense of a silk farm arises from rent, farm labor (*sic*), and the expense of the women, and others in charge. In the case of the Queen's Orphan Asylum all these expenses are *nil*; there is nothing to pay for rent, nothing to pay for the labour, and nothing to pay for the management. If the whole thing fail nothing is lost, if it succeed an amount will be gained which will render this heavy dead weight upon the resources of the country [*ie costs of operating the Orphan Schools*] a nullity".

The Royal Society was especially generous to the Orphan Schools. Gwenda Sheridan (p.82) says that



Bombyx Mori grubs and the mature *Bombyx Mori* moth

2389 plants were sent to the Orphan Schools between 1861 and 1866, mainly ornamental bedding plants like dahlias, but including 1000 white mulberry trees (*Morus alba*) struck from cuttings of the large tree in the Hobart Royal Botanical Gardens, and delivered to New Town in July 1864.

children and of the old women pensioners. She (*a Miss Clark*) **was able to get a good supply of leaves from some fine old mulberry trees there** [my highlights]. She expects to have 250,000 to 300,000 cocoons for silk ready to forward to Italy in care of Mrs Neill, by the next mail steamer'.



Fruit and leaves of *Morus alba*, white mulberry and (right) silk cocoons

Stutzer detailed the silkworm house required to care for the *Bombyx mori* insects, including a stable temperature at around 77°F, and the intensive labour required to strip mulberry trees of their leaves, then feed them to silkworms up to four times daily as they matured. Since there is no evidence confirming its construction, nor any announcement of produce from the venture, it probably never happened. What became of the 1000 mulberry trees is unknown, but since these species seldom live beyond 70 years, they would have expired by about 1930.

But they *were* planted, and at least some of their leaves were applied to silk production. A report titled 'Sericulture in Australia and Tasmania' was published in the *Melbourne Argus* of 23 January 1875, saying in part that 'The Tasmanian Government granted... the use of large rooms at the Orphan Asylum, and also the labor (*sic*) of the

From this project maybe the children enjoyed an occasional feed of fresh mulberries, even though this may not have satisfied Stutzer's lofty financial expectations of the project.

My grateful thanks to Hilary Burden, Dianne Snowden, Natalie Tapson and Carol Hill for their kind supply of source material for this article.

Bruce Lindsay.

2016 Deadlines for newsletter articles

1 November 2016

Contact us

Friends of the Orphan Schools,
PO Box 461,
North Hobart,
TAS 7002

email:

secretary@orphanschool.org.au

telephone messages:

03 6285 2654