

Consumptive Sanatorium Chalets St John's Park, New Town Hobart

Proposed Conservation and Maintenance



Alan Rogers Chalet (left) and the Rechabite Chalet (right behind the bush).

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for the Friends of the Orphan Schools, St John's Park Precinct

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Context

Historically, these are two of the last remaining huts from the Consumptive Sanatorium. They were originally located on the former John Edis Hospital site, which adjoined St John's Park Precinct. The Consumptive Sanatorium treated patients with consumption (also known as tuberculosis or TB). These chalets were moved to this location 25 years ago when the John Edis property was disposed of by the State Government.

The Sanatorium commenced in the early 20th Century in response to the TB outbreak and operated until after WWII, when compulsory X-Rays were introduced to detect early cases of the debilitating disease. [See Michael Roe, *Life over death: Tasmanians and tuberculosis* [Hobart, Tas.]: Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 1999; Freeman Collett Tasmania, Miranda Morris, HJM Environmental Strategies *John Edis Hospital site: conservation plan* (esp. Miranda Morris reference to the huts); and original files relating to the Committee and the City Architect Mr. Koch in Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office; Kim Pearce and Susan Doyle, *New Town: a social history* [Hobart, Tas.]: Hobart City Council, 2002].

Analysis

From these documents and Hobart City Councils records of the Metropolitan Drainage Board (MDB) plans the layout of the site (John Edis & Sanatorium) before the buildings were relocated can be determined. This means that we can determine what remains and what has changed. There are some other buildings that remain from different stages of the Sanatorium's development. *The Alan Roger's Chalet* is known to date from 1906 while the '*Rechabite*' Chalet is prototypical. It demonstrates the emphasis on fresh air and sunlight as part of the approach to treatment of the TB disease when there was no other known cure.

The *Alan Roger's Chalet* did have a small verandah covering a deck that has been removed. This is a distinguishing feature of this particular chalet. There is photographic evidence of the deck, steps and handrail under the gable extension that forms a verandah.

Statement of Significance

At the beginning of the 20th century when the huts were devised, it was a question of caring for an inevitable death or recuperation from what was then an incurable disease.

This was an amazing voluntary awareness issue in the community lead by several very prominent women, including Mrs. Colonel Fox and Mrs. Emily Dobson.

The disease was very poorly understood and resulted in isolating TB sufferers from the rest of the population. These chalets still demonstrate this isolation in their current location.

The two buildings actually represent a particular design and a prototypical chalet style. They are particularly important as humble documents related to the treatment of the disease, before there was a known cure for TB. These buildings were designed by the City Architect, Mr. Koch, on a voluntary basis.

The two buildings are also technological masterpieces of a form of construction which is no longer practiced but it was once common. As timber buildings they are historically traceable and of course they are now over 100 years old.



What should be done - or policy towards care

Three important steps need to be taken.

1. It is crucial for the conservation of the buildings that they are stabilized and that any further deterioration is immediately halted.
2. In the medium term there is some work that would make the chalets secure and accessible and reinstate missing features.
3. In the long term there is a need for them to have a proper location and disposition in relation to each other and the landscape context. They could have some much needed but low key interpretation inside them for when tours are conducted by the Friends of Orphan School, particularly on opening them up or entering them.

The proposition is that a visitor should be able to understand the patient and nursing staff's position and the operation of the Sanatorium. This should be done as part of a wider understanding of epidemic diseases that on the whole have been generally eradicated in Australia but are on the rise in other parts of the world.

Investigation and Planning of Works

This has involved a series of inspections by Danielle Pacaud from Heritage Tasmania, Brian Webberley [BW], a skilled trades and craft teacher and Robert Vincent [RV], a Cultural Resource Manager. The investigations have been done on a voluntary basis for the Friends of the Orphan Schools. The focus has been on the immediate and achievable by a voluntary effort rather than the later stages of medium and longer term view.

However there is also the possibility of a making a very short, low cost video recording on how to approach simple timber building maintenance and care, as a case study in timber technology in the context of the Burra Charter principle, 'as little as possible but as much as necessary'. Based on the application of the Heritage Notes published by NSW.

List of Works



The Alan Rogers Chalet.

Starting on the basis of top down and then bottom up

1. Repair the original finial by taking a pattern of the remaining finial.
2. BV to provide pattern to BW for execution.
3. Replace the flashing board on the southern gable with a pine board.
4. Secure the roof fixings. Replace if necessary.
5. Scrape corrugated iron roofing and treat with rust preventer.
6. Re-coat roof with undercoat and 2 coats of red roof paint after rust preventer has had several weeks to adhere
7. There is no evidence of guttering on the Alan Rogers Chalet so stormwater should be allowed to sheet to the ground. Two rows of contemporary K& D Pavers.
8. This involves the issue of relocation and appropriate foundations.
9. Initially, stop water and damp getting to the timber base of the building. Use Fortecon or plastic damp proof course (DPC) to create the appropriate separation between timber and the ground to stop moisture in the ground further rotting the timbers.
10. The illustration from the *Tasmanian Courier* 16 December 1906 p17 shows the colour scheme as being generally dark with light highlights on the bands arises and details. For the moment this is taken as a brown colour scheme with yellow or cream highlights. This is based on the colour found under the eaves. Specific sampling will now be done and samples may be sent to Donald Ellsmore for paint analysis.
11. The *Rechabite Chalet* needs some gentle repairs such as the cover strip gently tacked back and the interior needs to be coated in a colour similar to the ceiling finish. The interior of the hut should otherwise be left as is.
12. At least one of the fully opening sash windows needs to be made fully operable for interpretation purposes.



Bottom up

1. The simplest solution would be to immediately prepare two lots of footings to the rear of the existing location for both chalets about 4 m apart to create a suitable space between the buildings and the proper orientation towards the north (based on the original MDB plans).
2. Such foundations should take into account the re-establishment of the appropriate deck and steps to the entrances of both chalets.
3. 300 X 300 X 200 pad footings with a concrete block footing are entirely appropriate. This would distinguish the new from the old to the informed building conservator.
4. The building should be jacked up in its present position or appropriately lifted by fork lift or crane onto new level foundation mounts just a short distance uphill from its current location.

In part this also overcomes the problem of the buildings being so close to the current eucalyptus tree and foliage.

1. There are obvious timber repairs that are required in the base plates of both huts and a full inspection of the underside is currently impossible because they are sitting on the ground at the rear.
2. Having done this work and reallocated the chalets there is the obvious scraping and external painting of the outside of both huts in the new situation.
3. There is the reinstatement of the decking to the verandah of the Alan Rogers Chalet. In conjunction with the gable tie member and decorative elements replicated from the rear elevation.
4. There is the devising of an appropriate hinged flap to allow inspection of the copper panel, *the Alan Rogers Chalet* plaque. This should only be opened for inspection on tours.
5. Internally, *the Alan Rogers Chalet* should be gently cleaned but left to interpret itself as is. The *Rechabite Chalet* needs to be gently secured and the internal walls just repainted. The windows should be unclogged and made operable. That is fresh air right through the hut.

Cultural Landscape

Though these buildings have been displaced from the previous John Edis Hospital site it is possible by relating the buildings to the hillside and the gum tree to evoke a very similar sense of the isolation of these buildings from the rest of society. A

crucial element is the isolation - out of site out of mind except for the very occasional family visit. The current location has its merits given the development of other parts of the site. There is a real need for a buffer between these buildings and other activities on the St John's Park Precinct.



Appendix of incidental Details. Colour choices.



Rechabite Chalet - There is a faded green under the brown paint on the eaves the better sample is on the corrugated iron.



There is a gun metal black to the vertical corner post and the base plate.



This scraping revealed king-billy pine boards. This does explain why there is so little deterioration in a highly exposed and unprotected timber surface.



This hardwood element looks like a previous repair and it is severely deteriorated.