



## **Friends of the Orphan School and St. John's Park Precinct New Town Tasmania**

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### **1<sup>st</sup> Annual Report 2008**

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It is with great pleasure and pride that I present the 1st Annual Report of the Friends of the Orphan School and St John's Park Precinct.

On 14 December 2007, the group was established at a public meeting held in St John's Church, New Town. It 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 was 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 have a segment on the National Trust of Australia (Tasmania) website and have been included in National Trust publicity throughout the year. Thank-you to Chris Tassell, Managing Director of the National Trust and Jennie Chapman, State Promotions Manager, for facilitating this.

At the first meeting, our inaugural committee was elected:

Convenor	Dianne Snowden
Secretary	Kate Carlisle
Treasurer	Roger Stott
Committee Members:	David Featherstone; Eileen Levitt; Warwick Oakman; Karen Stott; Jessie Wagner

A number of changes to the committee occurred during the year: Joyce Purtscher and Rosemary Davidson joined the Committee in its early stages; and Karen Stott was appointed Deputy-Convenor. In August, our Secretary, Kate Carlisle, resigned and Karen Stott was appointed Acting Secretary. Kate shouldered a heavy workload in the initial stages of setting up the group and her experience with other organisations was a great asset. In October, Eileen Levett also resigned for health reasons. Eileen was instrumental in drawing up our draft Strategic Plan and provided invaluable, and sensible, advice to the Committee on a range of matters. We wish both Kate and Eileen well. All members of the Committee have done an outstanding job, and I wish to acknowledge their contribution and dedication. We also welcome and encourage assistance from other members of the group.

The Friends Group was officially launched on 20 May 2008 by the Minister for Environment, Parks, Heritage and the Arts, the Hon. Michelle O'Byrne MHA. The launch, held in the Church, was well-attended and we subsequently received good publicity, including in Leo Schofield's column in *The Mercury*. Since the launch, we have also received generous community support. The launch was attended by representatives of local schools who expressed an interest in becoming more involved with the Friends Group and we are currently exploring these partnerships.

Forming and strengthening community partnerships is an important role for the Group. From the beginning, one of our most important partners has been St John's Church. Those of you who were here twelve months ago will recall that the Church, at that time, was in danger of being closed. We have liaised closely with the Church and have been fortunate to have three members of the Church community on our Committee. As well, Canon David Lewis attends general meetings when possible to inform us of progress. In September, he announced that the church will not be closed down; that heritage architect Paul Davies is undertaking a Conservation Management Plan of the building; and that the Church has also committed to the restoration of the paper model of the building in the foyer of the Church. Canon Lewis also offered to publicise group activities within the wider Anglican Church.

Another crucial partnership is that with the State Government, through the Department of Health and Human Services, which is responsible for the site, and

with Heritage Tasmania. The Department has been supportive and allowed access to parts of the site. Heritage Tasmania has sought our advice on updating heritage registration sheets and through its Heritage Bulletin has offered publicity. Both are partnerships which need strengthening and consolidating. We have identified parts of the site which are particularly vulnerable and hope to work with the State Government to protect them. We also hope to secure some interpretation for the Burial Ground. As members, you can help us achieve these goals by continuing your support for the Group.

Our excursion program, which has been a great success, is an intrinsic part of highlighting the significance of the site. Our first excursion was held in April during the Heritage Festival. Excursion leaders Warwick Oakman and Joyce Purtscher have shared their knowledge and insights frequently and willingly, and, through their excursions, have generated a great deal of community support for our Group. In November, Joyce also addressed the Adult Education Midcity School for Seniors Program at the 50s and Better Centre in Hobart. In October, I led a short excursion of 50 Grade 7 Ogilvie High School students to selected parts of the site. Many people contribute to the success of the excursions: David Featherstone opens the Church and plays the organ for participants; Jessie Wagner opens the Parish Centre and organises afternoon tea with a small group of helpers; Roger Stott collects payment; and Karen Stott has picked up the administrative tasks, including bookings. Other members help out as needed.

In September, we approved the formation of a Special Interest Group, the Descendants of Orphans Group. Christine Woods, well-known and experienced historical researcher, was appointed Convenor and Joyce Purtscher, Rosie Davidson, and Dianne Snowden joined the group's organising committee. The children of the Orphan School had few holidays or celebrations but once a year, in February, they were treated to what became known as 'Fox's Feast'. The Descendants Group has decided that its first event will be a 'Fox's Feast' picnic, to be held on 15 February 2009. The Group is also compiling a Register of Descendants and welcomes interested descendants.

General meetings and committee meetings are held in the St John's Parish Centre, for which we pay a small rent. Average attendance at general meetings is about 25. Our membership goal for 2008 was 50 and this was well and truly surpassed: our Treasurer informs me that we have now have about 140 members. The challenge will be to encourage them all to renew. As our membership has grown, we have become conscious of the need to keep members informed and involved. We welcome your suggestions of ways in which this can be done. One of our members Andrew Cocker offered his skills as Web Manager and has been steadily working on the development of our website. Our Acting Secretary Karen Stott arranged for an email address and monitors an ever-increasing number of

emails sent to the group. In November 2008, we published our first newsletter, designed to inform our general membership of events and activities and to raise awareness of the group. Thank-you to Karen, Toni and Rosie for work on this professional looking publication. Karen, incidentally, is also responsible for the exceptional line drawings of the buildings which feature on our letterhead and on the website.

We have instituted a program of General Meetings with Guest Speakers and have been fortunate in the quality of the speakers and their presentations. In June, Joyce Purtscher was our first Guest Speaker, with 'Suffer the Little Children', her account of life in the Orphan School for the children who lived there. In September, Andy McKinlay told us about the 'Early Orphan Schools of Hobart'. In November, members were invited to bring memorabilia associated with the site. A highlight of the evening was Sid Davis and the writing box he was given by his father. At this meeting, Robert Vincent and Warwick Oakman presented their idea for the 2009 Calendar, featuring architectural drawings by John Lee Archer, which I am delighted to say is now available. I would like to thank all those involved for their hard work for achieving this in such a short time.

The Research Group, formed at our committee meeting in January, met regularly in 2008, with Toni Sherwood as Convenor. This year, the group has focused on gathering and cataloguing existing information. Some members have also worked extensively on individual projects. Joyce Purtscher has produced and published an electronic database, *Tasmanian Paupers and Invalids*, and Rosemary Davidson has conducted comprehensive research on the St. John's Church Burial Register. Dianne Snowden's research interest has included St. John's Church and other buildings on the site, while Caroline Evans has focused on twentieth-century history. In the next year, the Research Group, under the direction of Caroline Evans, plans to gather some oral histories. Alan and Lyn McCreary recently assisted with some historical archival research on the St John's Bell Medallions and the Research Group always welcomes assistance such as this from general members and interested parties.

For me, the highlight of the year has been the way in which our Group has grown and consolidated and above all, the way that the site itself has captured the imaginations of so many diverse groups in the community. The response to our radio interviews on Chris Wisby's ABC radio program in October reflects this, as does the feedback for our 2009 calendar.

Some of you will remember the 1939 sketch of the proposed development of the site, which included the demolition of the Orphan School buildings. The war intervened and the demolition did not take place. For me, this image serves as a

constant reminder of the fragility of our heritage and the reason why the Friends of the Orphan School and St John's Park needs to exist.

To the Committee, members and supporters, thank-you all for your contribution and commitment. I look forward to working with you in 2009.

Dianne Snowden Convenor

