



Friends of the Orphan Schools and St John's Park Precinct New Town Tasmania

Issue 9

Newsletter

November 2010

Annual General Meeting

The third Annual General Meeting of the Friends of the Orphan School and St John's Park Precinct (FOSP) was held in the Old Sunday School at St John's Park on Thursday 11 November 2010 at 5.30 pm. The Annual Report was presented by our convenor Dr Dianne Snowden (an edited version of this report is printed below) and the treasurer Simon Cocker presented the financial accounts as at 31 October 2010. Income for the period 1/12/2009 to 31/10/2010 was \$2953.80 and expenditure totalled \$1695.25 leaving a surplus of \$1257.55. FOSP'S total assets at 31/10/2010 were \$5551.19. At the meeting it was resolved that in future years FOSP would hold its AGM in July and that financial reports would coincide with the end-of-financial year, rather than the end of a calendar year. This brings us in line with the National Trust's reporting period. In response to an enquiry from the floor about the current state of negotiations with the Tasmanian Government and the National Trust of Australia regarding the future of the Precinct and in particular the original Orphan Schools, Dianne said that negotiations were ongoing and current. She emphasised that the National Trust continued to be very interested in the Precinct.

The following office bearers were elected for 2011:

Convenor: Dianne Snowden
Deputy Convenor: Toni Sherwood
Secretary: Andrew Cocker
Treasurer: Simon Cocker
Minute Secretary: Andrea Gerrard

Assistant Treasurer: Roger Stott
Web Manager: Andrew Cocker
General committee members: Rosemary Davidson, Joyce Purtscher & Lisa Hutton
Three ex-officio members were appointed: David Featherstone (St John's Church), Wendy Frost (Ogilvie High School) & Danny Neal (New Town Primary School).
Canon David Lewis acted as the returning officer.

Following the Annual General Meeting, Dianne presented "A Most Humane Regulation?" Free children transported with convict parents.' Dianne originally gave this paper at the 17th Australasian Irish Studies Conference, July 2010 in Belfast. Her research suggests that women transported to the Australian colonies were often very determined to bring their dependent children along with them. Convict records often do not name children, nor is there any indication of the ways in which children and mothers came to sail together. In some cases it appears that the parishes in the centres from where the convicts came arranged for children to travel with their mothers; other evidence indicates that convict women made considerable effort to ensure their children were not abandoned. Dianne's paper highlighted the ways in which these women maintained their agency and responsibilities as mothers to children who would otherwise be abandoned.

Third Annual Report of the Friends of the Orphan School and St John's Park Precinct

It is now three years since the Friends of the Orphan School and St John's

Park Precinct was established at a public meeting held in St John's Church, New Town. 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.

Early in the New Year, we were saddened to learn of the death of Jessie Wagner, one of our foundation members and a member of our inaugural Committee. Jessie died on 8 January 2010 and her funeral service was held in St John's Church. Jessie was devoted to her Church and to the Friends of the Orphan School, and she is sadly missed.

Once again, your Committee has worked tirelessly on your behalf and I thank them all very much for their hard work, energy and commitment. Andrew Cocker has done an outstanding job not only as Secretary but also as Web Manager and Building Manager. Andrea Gerrard has cheerfully performed the tedious job of taking the minutes. Simon

Cocker has done an exceptional job as Treasurer, once again ably assisted by Roger Stott. Joyce Purtscher has continued our popular excursion program. David Featherstone has generously contributed his time when we have an excursion or special event; playing the organ in the Church and really bringing its history alive. Toni Sherwood and Rosie Davidson have produced an informative and professional-looking newsletter, much appreciated by all who receive it and a vital form of communication with members and supporters. All committee members have contributed generously to the smooth running of those general meetings we have had. We also thank Lisa Hutton for auditing our books.

The Research and Publications Group, with Toni Sherwood as Convenor, has continued to meet regularly in 2010. Quarterly research days in the Tasmanian Heritage and Archive Office, introduced last year, lapsed in 2010 but we hope to resurrect them in 2011. The Oral History Project will, likewise, be revived in 2011.

Chris Woods has continued to convene the Descendants of Orphans' Special Interest Group and with a small committee successfully organised our second Fox's Feast on 28 February 2010 in the old St John's Sunday School. The event included an outstanding photographic display and Bruce Woods' photographs of the day have been compiled into a CD. Once again, Joyce Purtscher provided a booklet for the occasion: *School days at the Queen's Orphan Schools New Town, Tasmania 1848*. It has proved particularly popular.

In 2008, Andrew Cocker generously offered to design and host a website for our group. On 23 May this year, during the 2010 Heritage Festival, the website was officially launched by the Hon. Lin Thorp, MLC, Minister for Education and Skills, Minister for Children and Minister for Police and Emergency Services. I am pleased to announce that this week Andrew installed a 'Find an Orphan Search' facility on the website. It is easy to use and a great starting point for research and sharing stories.

At the end of 2009, the National Trust leased the Old Sunday School on our behalf from the Department of Health

and Human Services. We are working towards establishing an interpretation and resource centre in the building and Andrew Cocker, our Building Committee convenor, with assistance from the Committee and interested members, has spent a great deal of time and effort making this happen. We now hire out the hall to the Tasmanian Family History Society Inc. This not only provides a source of income but helps promote the Friends group more widely.

When concluding my Annual Report for 2009, I noted that, in a very short time, our group has grown in strength and public recognition – thanks largely to the commitment and generosity of our membership. We are now at that crucial stage where we need to capitalise on our strengths and to consolidate, and to keep advocating for the conservation of the site, especially the most vulnerable areas.

Dianne Snowden, Convenor

End-of year Concert

Next Sunday 28 November we will host a concert featuring the Choir of High Hopes Hobart at St John's Church. The Choir will be accompanied by Andrew Morrisby and vocal solo performances will be given by soprano Melinda Briton and choir members Sylvia Romeike and Lucy Henry. Choir member and poet, Ron Challis will read some of his poetry and David Featherstone will play the organ. The doors will open at 2.10 pm. and the performance will begin at 2.30.

The Choir of High Hopes was formed in 2007 and has just celebrated its third birthday. It is modelled on the Choir of Hard Knocks established by Jonathon Welch, also in 2007, and like this choir, the Choir of High Hopes endeavours to offer opportunity and healing through song for disadvantaged people in our community. The choir focuses on increasing self-esteem, personal pride and a sense of purpose as members reconnect with community through their involvement in choir activities.

In its three years of operation, the choir has enjoyed considerable success – their performance calendar is growing each year and membership numbers continue to increase. Artistic director Helen Todd estimates that in excess of one hundred people are

involved in choir activities such as regular attendance at choir practice, workshops and performances.

A gold coin donation is requested for entry to the concert and money raised will be donated to the St John's Organ Repair Fund. Please come along, bring your family and friends and support both the Choir and the Fund.

The Organ Repair Fund

The Organ Repair Fund was established in 1952 to provide funds for major repairs and renovations of the church organ, which was built in 1886 by the London firm William Hill & Sons. This company was responsible for a number of significant pipe organs in Britain and Australia, including the Grand Organ for the Sydney Town Hall built in 1889, and at that time, the largest in the world. David Featherstone has been the organist at St John's for well over thirty years. He points out that the organ is one of the best in Tasmania and on a par with others in St John's Church, Launceston, the Hobart Town Hall and St David's Cathedral, Hobart. The organ at New Town has been maintained scrupulously over the years and its pipe work – important in terms of sound quality – survives in its original configuration and specification. The organ was rebuilt in 1955 as a memorial to the men of the parish who died in World War 11 and restored in 1978, but is again in need of urgent upgrades and repairs.

Money raised at Sunday's concert will contribute to the much needed replacement of some electrical components as well as major work to the sound bellows. David informs me they have performed faithfully for sixty years but are now in need of some refurbishment.

David says the organ is an invaluable musical resource that has an essential place in the cultural heritage of the church, precinct and community. The quality of the organ, together with the excellent acoustics of St John's Church, make the church popular as a performance venue for both local and international artists.

We are pleased to support this worthwhile cause.

Contact us at:

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