



FRIENDS OF THE ORPHAN SCHOOLS

St John's Park Precinct New Town Tasmania

Issue 22

NEWSLETTER

April 2015

Website News

Our web site was launched in May 2010 and Joyce Purtscher's database, based on her transcription of the original admission registers, was added in November of that year. This exposed the details of some 6,000 children and provided the only online record for most of them. This has enabled many researchers to find a record of the existence of their ancestors for the first time. The website also allows descendants to claim their orphan and add their story and photos. Once claimed, other researchers can make contact and many people have taken advantage of this.

The website continues to attract several thousand unique visitors each month and 788 orphan claims (about 13%) have been lodged, most with additional information and a few with wonderful photos. Starting with this newsletter we plan to share some of these stories. The first is that of Sarah Elizabeth Briggs. Admitted in August 1839, she is the GG grandmother of two of our committee members.

Kickstart Arts - Multicultural Arts Centre

Kickstart makes art with people to celebrate difference. It shares their great ideas as it promotes new possibilities, better health and positive

social change. Since 1992, their skilled professional artists have been helping people from diverse backgrounds all around Tasmania to share their personal stories in extraordinary ways, opening hearts & minds and building bridges of understanding across the community.

The historic 1831 South Building, built in Governor Arthur's time, and once used as an institution for orphans and "waifs" is getting a new life as The Kickstart Arts Centre.

Having been partially demolished in the 1960s, this building was falling into disrepair, but KSA were lucky enough to get funding from the State and Federal Gov-

ernments to renovate and create a multicultural arts centre.

It will include a fully professional kitchen, studio space for artists, an events space and rehearsal room, galleries and meeting rooms. The electrical wiring has been made safe to contemporary standards, all asbestos material has been removed, there is a new ceiling in the Hall, and layers of paint have been removed so the windows can open again!

The works are being undertaken by builders CDC Developments, overseen by Philp Lighton Architects and the landlords, DHHS.

Works are expected to be completed by May.



An overview of the renovations of the Southern Wing from Jami Bladel

The renovations of the Southern wing of the Orphan School are moving on apace. The ceiling in the School Room has been replaced, the asbestos removed and a new fresh coat of paint, in the interestingly named colour of "Hogs Bristle", in a half strength tone. The wiring has all been replaced and the roof repaired - so there are no more leaks and no more water damage. The walls which were damaged by water have been repaired and replastered and those rooms are waiting for their coat of paint.

The 2nd floor bathroom has had the pressed tin ceiling mended, and the asbestos from the floor in that room has also been removed. Every room has one new light and one new power point and the school room has wiring for theatre lighting so that the space can be used for exhibitions and events. The Kitchen is being reclaimed as a kitchen. The cabinetry has not yet been fitted as it is currently under construction, but there will be new benches, pantry, cupboards, a hob stove and oven, fridges and a new sink under the window. We will then be able to stand at the sink and look out over the blossom and the talk to the Frog Mouth owl in the garden when we wash the dishes.

The community meeting room is being refurbished with paint and internet wiring connections. The old Parlour is being readied for use as a small gallery. Members of many different multicultural groups will use the space to share cultures and build bridges of understanding across the community. All the floors are being covered in a lovely neutral bamboo which will preserve the old floor boards, feel warm and look natural and stylish.

There will be new sinks in The School room, so arts activity groups will have access to a wet area, and there will be a bank of cupboards for storage. The whole space is being warmed by a heat pump. And when can we see it you ask? KSA will be happy to show people around anytime from May onwards and we are planning a ministerial launch with a party, exhibition and workshops held over the weekend of the 21st August.

Watch our Facebook page for updates!

Sanatorium Chalet Project



Another exciting milestone in the conservation of the Allan Rogers Chalet is looming. After Easter Fairbrother will be returning to the site to restore the steps and verandah to the front. This part of the structure has special historical significance as it was on this verandah that Governor Strickland stood to make his grand speech on the official opening of the Sanatorium in 1906.

Along with the new roofs this will complete the major tasks and allow the Friends to move onto the next stage of developing the Chalet as an interpretation centre for

the Tasmanian Sanatorium Association.

As always the committee is operating on minimal funds and is seeking donations of the timber needed for the project.

Project Manager Simon Cocker said that there have been some offers made, but the timber available will mean a change in the design of the supporting structure. Architect and Friends committee member Peter Gaggin is examining the feasibility of changing the plans.

Fox's Feast

The annual celebration of Fox's Feast was held on Sunday 1st March 2015. A highlight of the day was members recounting of their personal acquaintances and connections with the Orphan School. We were particularly pleased to welcome our Canadian visitor Ian Robson of Toronto.

Members present gave brief but delightful accounts of their orphan ancestors, including Julie Vaszocz who came from Burnie for the event. Her ancestor Robert Harris was apprenticed to the Cornwall

Chronicle and later went on to find the Wellington Times in Burnie, later named the Advocate. It remained in the Harris family until 2003. You can read more about Robert Harris, orphan 4200, in the Find an Orphan section on our website.

The traditional scattering of rose petals on the burial ground was held. Members were also treated to an inspection of the chalets conducted by Simon Cocker and Peter Gaggin.

O'Neal Family Reunion

On Sunday 28 March Committee Treasurer Simon Cocker led a tour of the site for the O'Neal Family re-union. The family group of 20 or so was assisted on the tour by committee members the Reverend David Lewis, Peter Gaggin, Berry Dunston and wonderfully catered for by Bernadette Bell.

The O'Neal family has many historic connections with the site, and they were very happy to be shown through the buildings, including the Church and the recently refurbished TB Chalets.

Visit to Shene Estate, Pontville

There are still places available for members and friends on our excursion to Shene Estate (Historic Site 1819) at Pontville at 10.00am on Sunday 3 May 2015.

The *Butler's Bounty Tour* costs \$35.00 per person and consists of a 2 hour guided walking tour with tea, coffee and home baked cakes served in the 1852 stables.

It includes access to the Shene historic site in its entirety including the properties, homestead, stables, barn, servant quarters, dairy and the Estates out-buildings. Shene has a direct link with St. John's church clock, so come along to find out what it is.

Members will need to arrange their own transport to Pontville, directions will be given after

booking. Please register your interest with committee member Bernadette Bell by text message (0409 975 321), or by email (bernadette.bell@hotmail.com) no later than 10 April 2015.

SARAH ELIZABETH BRIGGS (Orphan 478)

In 1620 the Dean family built Old House Farm in Barkisland which is a village in West Yorkshire, 6.4 km south-west of Halifax, in the UK.



In 1737 Joseph Dean and his wife Mary built New House Farm on the opposite side of the road.

In 1785 Joseph ceased farming and opened New House Farm as a pub named 'Sign of the Cross' after a nearby stone Celtic Cross.

In 1798 Moses, son of Joseph, died, aged 49 years and left his property to be divided among his six children, once they were 21 years old. This decision by Moses, to share his estate equally was the start of a series of disasters

that resulted in the death of his youngest daughter, her husband being transported to Van Diemen's Land and their daughter being committed to the Orphan School in New Town.

The second husband of Moses' widowed wife Mary (née Stansfield) was a local stonemason, John Ainley. John tried to comply with the terms of the will and some of the children were paid but there was not enough money to pay everyone. When the youngest daughter Alice, who was born in 1797, came of age there was nothing left and the pub had been mortgaged three times over, which eventually led to a fraud trial and on 27 December 1825 John Ainley, Innkeeper of Barkisland, was declared bankrupt.

Alice had married Isaac Briggs in 1821 and on 22 May 1827 Isaac was also declared bankrupt. The pub, Sign of the Cross, was sold along with the other land and assets by public auction on 29 June 1827. The pub still trades today as one of the only two in Barkisland, and is now known as the 'Fleece Inn'.

Isaac Briggs, a weaver and second born child of Grace (née Firth) and Joseph Briggs married Alice Dean on 27 October 1821 in St John the Baptist Church, Halifax. Declared bankrupt, Isaac must have been desperate to provide for his wife who was pregnant with Sarah



Elizabeth and he resorted to crime and became a member of an infamous local gang of forgers. Just days before Sarah Elizabeth was born Isaac was sentenced to death at the City of York Summer Assizes.

Reprieved, Isaac was sentenced to transportation for life and departed London for Hobart Town on 26 March 1829 aboard the convict ship *Lady Harewood*, arriving at Hobart Town on 28 July 1829, the day his daughter Sarah Elizabeth turned one.

Isaac worked at the Female Factory, at South Hobart where he taught the convict women how to sort/comb/card and spin the wool. He then spent time on Maria Island where he was one of twenty-four male convicts detained to assist in the closing down of the first Maria Island settlement. Isaac was 'assigned' to Port Arthur in 1832 and in 1833 was on 'public works'—location not specified. From 1840–1845 he was at Bridgewater—when not on the tread-wheel in Hobart or in the local lock-up.

Isaac's records show he spent many days on the dreaded tread wheel in gaol—for 21 days from 13 August 1839 which was only nine days before his wife Alice and daughter Sarah Elizabeth were to have arrived in Hobart. In May 1840 the Lieutenant-Governor deprived him of his Ticket of Leave and ordered him to three months hard labour on the roads at Green Ponds.

Meanwhile, in September 1838 Alice Briggs and daughter, Sarah, had departed Liverpool, England for Sydney to join her husband Isaac in VDL. Isaac's brother Benjamin, his wife Lydey and their four children accompanied them.

Their ship, *Dunlop*, with Captain Bance in command of eighty-one

emigrants from the UK headed for Hobart Town, ran ashore in fine weather at Cape Town, Cape of Good Hope, South Africa on 24 November 1838, going to pieces within hours. The Briggs families walked into Cape Town where for almost six weeks, they were at the mercy of local benevolent societies; a public subscription for donations having been established.

On 1 January 1839 they departed Cape Town on the *James Moran*, arriving in Port Jackson, NSW on 11 February 1839, a voyage of 41 days.

Five months later, on 17 July 1839, Alice and Sarah Briggs left Sydney aboard the *Medway* at the expense of the VDL government. The journey from Sydney to Hobart Town took an extraordinary five weeks. There were extremely bad storms and Master Borthwick Wight had to take measures to protect the passengers, one being Lady Jane Franklin, wife of Lieutenant-Governor John Franklin.

Eleven months after leaving Liverpool and within just days of her destination, Alice died. She was buried at sea on 1 August 1839 off the Bay of Fires, north-east VDL.

This event and her interactions with Sarah Briggs are recorded in Lady Jane Franklin's journals.

Thursday 1st August

Snachall told me when bringing my break-fast, that the poor daft woman Mrs Briggs had died about an hour before - It was only at dinner yesterday that I heard she was seriously ill, though some jokes had been afloat for a day or two previously as to Mr Grant giving her Mollison's pills, sometimes whole, sometimes pounded, sometimes in a powder by way of variety - I thought I would go and see her either after dinner or next morning, but left it till morning - her complaint appears to have

been inflammation of the bowels and she said all thru' her indisposition that she should die. At 12 o'clock I heard the bell toll, and took it to be a mark of decent respect to her memory, but presently Mr Elliot knocked at my door and asked if I would be present at the funeral. I made what haste I could to go on deck, where Captain and sailors and the women assembled and Mr Braim read the service which he did very well.

Mrs Briggs had a little girl on board, 11 or 12 years old, she was said to have behaved very ill to her mother and to have shown not the least feeling at her death - the child was present, was observed to watch very attentively and to be affected at the disappearance of her mother in the waves - I sent for the child after dinner in my cabin and found her very interesting and as I thought clever, expressing herself in terms and in a manner beyond her years.

She did not express any sorrow at her mother's death, but could have wished she had been buried on the land, she said. I mentioned at tea the favourable impression she had produced on me and then found that all the gentlemen partly Wright, Grant, Braim and Elliot agreed in thinking her a very bad child and Captain who was never mistaken - he said in anyone's countenance thought she had one of the worst he had ever met.

Tuesday 6th/3 weeks

- had sick headache - At night the wind fell and we rolled more in the calm than before - having heard that Sarah had put on her other frock and the pinafore she had made herself and was very anxious to know if I should send for her (which was owing no doubt to Mr. Braim and M. Stanley having talked to her, I sent for her while in bed. She looked very tidy, with her hair brushed back

behind her ears - read to her, made her read ...

They eventually arrived in Hobart Town passing Adventure Bay, Bruny Island on 19 August. Lady Franklin arranged for Sarah to be admitted to the Queens Orphan School at New Town and called in a few days later. Her journal continued on 22 August 1839:

I enquired for Sarah Briggs who arrived in the school yesterday and has been scrubbed and washed and clothed afresh, operations which Mrs Gazard assured me were highly necessary. I sent for Sarah who seemed pleased to see me, but flung herself round a little when I gave her some good advice.

Sarah stayed in the Orphan School for two years and three months, being discharged on 12 November 1841 when she was released to the care of her Uncle Benjamin Briggs and his wife Lydey.

Benjamin and family had arrived in VDL on 3 April 1840 on the Marion Watson from Sydney some eight months after Sarah. Lydey Briggs died in childbirth, aged 36, on 8 November 1842 at Brighton—Sarah probably then cared for her younger cousins. Brothers Benjamin and Isaac were fellmongers in the Black Brush district, working on the banks of the Jordan River.

Sarah, aged 17, married convict John Cocker, aged 33, at Green Ponds on 22 August 1845. John had been sentenced to 21 years' transportation after conviction for his third attempt at desertion from the British Army; the last time in Montreal around the time of the Canadian Uprising. John and Sarah had eleven children.

According to his inquest on 2 November 1852 Isaac Briggs died at Black Brush on 28 Oct 1852 of natural causes. Evidence given paints a sad picture of a lonely

man who had become an alcoholic. He was buried on 4 November 1852 by Reverend John Burrowes in an unmarked grave at St Marks Church of England, Pontville.

It is unlikely Sarah saw her father again after she and husband John Cocker chose to leave the Brighton District. By April 1848 when Sarah gave birth to her second child (Sarah) they were at Lincoln in the Macquarie River district of Campbell Town. By April 1851 the Cocker family was living at Hadspen where they re-mained for about nine years and was where the next three children were born. Between 1860 and 1863 the growing family lived at Hagley, Quamby and Westbury. The eleventh and last child was born at Barrington in 1870.

We know that religion played a large part in Sarah's life as all her children were baptised in the Methodist faith within three months of birth. Journeys from Hadspen to Launceston's Paterson St Church were made on four occasions, and for the youngest, Jane Evangeline, a trip was made from Barrington to Latrobe. What may be a 15-minute journey by car today was probably a full day's return journey by horse and cart or bullock and dray and a major commitment.

John Cocker died at Evandale in 1872 after an accident with a steam threshing machine. He was working as a wheat feeder with two of his sons on the Cambock estate at Evandale, then leased by Edward Easton, for a Mr Bryan when his foot was caught in the machine.

His last words when they tried to extricate him were, "Don't; let me alone; I'm all right." But the machine had pulled his left leg off and he died at the scene within minutes.

Within three months of his death, Sarah made application for charitable assistance for her four youngest children. Sarah died from a cramped bowel on 30 August 1874, aged 46 at the home of her son John at Barrington, two years after the death of her husband.

The families of Isaac and Alice Briggs and his brother Benjamin and Lydey have grown to include over 2000 people and some 450 unique surnames. Their details may be found at www.cocker.id.au. Isaac, Alice and Sarah Briggs were buried in unmarked graves; the sea, St Marks Pontville and, we believe, Barrington.

Descendants commemorated their lives with a ceremony and the unveiling of a plaque at St Marks Church in February 2015.



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