



FRIENDS OF THE ORPHAN SCHOOLS

ST JOHN'S PARK PRECINCT, NEW TOWN, TASMANIA

SUBMISSION TO LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL INQUIRY INTO BUILT HERITAGE TOURISM

The Friends of the Orphan Schools, St John's Park Precinct, was formed in December 2007 under the umbrella of the National Trust of Australia (Tasmania) to highlight the importance of this significant heritage site and ensure its preservation and conservation.

The Orphan Schools operated on the New Town site from the early 1830s to 1879. The buildings, commissioned by Governor Arthur, were designed by the renowned colonial architect John Lee Archer. Most of those admitted to the institution were the children of convicts.

The Friends of the Orphan Schools has prepared this submission in response to public notices appearing in *The Mercury* in 2014.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require further information.

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The Friends of the Orphan Schools submission considers the six points referred to the advertisement for the Inquiry:

1. The current and future potential contribution that built heritage makes to tourism in Tasmania

Built heritage is an important cultural and economic asset and a major tourism attraction. It makes a significant contribution to the Tasmanian tourism industry.

Visitor numbers to Tasmania are increasing. The 'Tasmanian Tourism Information Monitor Snapshot' for December 2014 noted that 70% of visitors indicate that they like to visit heritage and historical sites.

The Australian Convict Sites World Heritage serial listings (2010) have a spin-off for other sites with a convict association, some of which could be added to the WHA list. The orphan schools building have the potential to be a heritage tourism drawcard, with adequate recognition, funding and support.

Despite the valuable work of the Friends of the Orphan Schools, the orphan school buildings remain an under-recognised yet highly significant heritage site.

2. The role of Government

Government has an important leadership role in the promotion of built heritage tourism, not just through Tourism Tasmania but across all agencies. The orphan school site is owned by the Crown (and has been for more than 180 years); it is currently operated by Health and Human Services. Given current economic constraints, this agency has difficulty managing heritage sites; it is not its 'core business'.

Government has a role in developing an understanding of the depth and extent of the State's heritage assets and how they are managed.

3. The role of tourism organisations

Tourism organisations have a role in data gathering, an important aspect of understanding the true picture of heritage tourism.

4. The role of heritage organisations

The general functions and powers of the Tasmanian Heritage Council (under the *Historic Cultural Heritage Act 1995*) include:

7. (g) to assist in the promotion of tourism in respect of places of historic cultural heritage significance

However, because the Heritage Council is underfunded, it is rarely able to fulfil this function. Most of its time is spent on in fulfilling its statutory obligations.

Many volunteer organisations such as the Friends of The Orphan Schools play a valuable role in the promotion of heritage tourism. The Friends' membership is international and the group hosts visitors from Tasmania, interstate and overseas, keen to know more the Orphan Schools, often in a family history context. The Group receives no government funding and relies entirely on volunteers. This is typical of many history and heritage groups in Tasmania.

5. Any relevant considerations in other jurisdictions

Western Australia's heritage lottery provides a model for funding of cultural heritage. Tasmania has no designated heritage funding similar to this and the Group considers this a major shortcoming.

6. Any other matter incidental

The Friends believe that the focus on 'built tourism' is too narrow: moveable cultural heritage is an integral part of heritage tourism but under current legislation does not receive protection. The Friends of the Orphan Schools recently undertook a volunteer conservation project to protect and preserve the vulnerable TB Sanatorium chalets, the last remnants of the village that was created on the St John's site in the early 20th century.

The development of consistent signage and interpretation of built heritage sites is an integral part of built heritage tourism. The 1830s John Lee Archer Orphan School buildings at New Town have no signage or interpretation. The buildings have been owned by the Crown for more than 180 years. The Friends of the Orphan Schools, a volunteer group under the umbrella of the National Trust of Australia (Tasmania), is currently undertaking a project to provide interpretation for the unmarked burial ground on the site. The burial ground has approximately 2000 burials, including 400 orphan school children and Aboriginal children who died in the institution.

People and their stories are an integral part of built heritage tourism, bringing to life buildings and places. An important part of the Friends work concerns the people behind the walls of stone and brick that are the Orphan Schools, and especially the lives of the hundreds of children who lived there. The research to facilitate this is a vital part of built heritage tourism.heritage.

An increasing number of community buildings, especially churches and schools, are being sold and developed. The Friends acknowledge the importance of adaptive re-use but not at the expense of insufficient protection.

The Tasmanian community includes a number of highly skilled heritage professionals whose expertise could be utilised to promote heritage tourism.

The Friends of the Orphan Schools group is happy to appear before the Legislative Council Inquiry into Built heritage if required.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require further information.