



Edinburgh Old Town Association Newsletter

January 2012

This time last year we reported on the problems encountered with noisy and persistent busking in the Old Town. We now have some good news to report on this front. Following consultations with local residents and traders, the Council and Police have devised a new procedure to preserve the quality of life of local residents and businesses but enabling the Edinburgh street entertainment tradition in the Old Town to continue to flourish. The initiative assumes that it is preferable to achieve the required results by education, rather than by prosecution, and of course, if it works, there will be less of a burden on Police and Council resources.

The way that the initiative works is by Police Officers and members of the Council's City Centre Team speaking to buskers, registering their names on a central record file and providing them with a card entitled 'Hit the Right Note – A Guide for Buskers in Edinburgh'.

The card provides clearly presented advice on the dos and don'ts of good practice. It advises busking only between 9 am and 9 pm, moving on after a maximum of two hours, and to stop if a request is made to them. It also stipulates that amplifiers are only to be used if permission is granted but, most significantly, it points out that if they do not comply with this advice and complaints are received from members of the public, their equipment may be seized and they may be referred to the Procurator Fiscal.

The scheme started just before the Festival Fringe started, and of course the big uncertainty has been as to how well it would work. In fact the results have been most encouraging, and only a small number of those on the register have had to be spoken to on a second occasion. It will be a continuing situation however as there are bound to be small numbers of buskers who still fail to conform, and of course there will be new arrivals who need to be brought into the scheme, but the approach is so far proving highly successful.

It appears that the majority, if provided with a clear, straightforward and workable framework in which to operate, are perfectly happy to conform. The fact that the penalties for breaking the rules are also spelled out will doubtless reinforce the situation, and if in any particular case further action is taken, the news will soon get around the busker community.

You can approach intrusive buskers directly and ask them to move on or, if you prefer, contact the Council City Centre Neighbourhood Office on 0131 529 7061 or email citycentreteam@edinburgh.gov.uk, or Lothian & Borders Police on 0131 311 3131.



Now you see them...



Now you don't.

Dragon Hunt

An eagle-eyed member of the OTA committee noticed that the dragon brackets in the pend leading from the Lawnmarket to Wardrop's Court had gone – all four had vanished. Concerned that they might have been stolen, our committee member made enquiries. A street vendor said 'they' had taken the dragons for restoration. But that is just what 'they' would say if theft was intended.

An enquiry to the City Council at Waverley Court drew a blank. Our intrepid

investigator then had a brain-wave and called the Writers' Museum in Lady Stair's Close. Again, the response was that 'they' had removed the dragons for repair and repainting.

Having a good idea who 'they' might be, the OTA contacted Paul McAuley, Collections Care Officer at the City Council. Paul confirmed that the dragons were sitting in the workshop of the Museum Collections Centre in Broughton Market awaiting restoration.



Georgina Von Hof, James Muldoon and Paul McAuley with the Wardrop's Court dragons in the City of Edinburgh Council's Museum Collections Centre in Broughton Market.



Dragons carved by J S Gibson

Claire Geddes, a grand-daughter of Patrick Geddes who built the Lawnmarket tenement, had noticed the poor condition of the dragons and had contacted Fiona Rankin of Edinburgh World Heritage. EWH and the City Council are collaborating on the restoration: EWH is paying for the carving of replacement teeth and tails and the City Council for the labour. The Brownlee Old Town Trust is paying for the gold leaf and a contribution towards the labour.

Paul McAuley's report on the dragon brackets notes that the Lawnmarket pair were carved by J S Gibson, author of *The Woodcarver*, a treatise on carving published in Edinburgh in 1886. The Lawnmarket dragons are more ornate and detailed and more professionally carved than the Wardrop's Court pair.

The Wardrop's Court pair, which, unusually, are dog-headed, were carved by Patrick Geddes's son Arthur Geddes under the supervision of Alec Miller who worked



Dog-headed dragons carved by Arthur Geddes

with Charles Robert Ashbee's Guild of Handicraft, a socialist co-operative based on the principles of John Ruskin and William Morris. These are very distinguished dragons.

Both pairs of dragons are made of wood. Originally both pairs were painted blue with gilded highlights. At some time, the Lawnmarket pair were painted green. The pend-sides of both pairs are in better condition than the sides that faced outwards and suffered the full force of a century of Edinburgh's weather.

The restoration, following advice from Sarah Gerrish, a specialist wood conservator, will be carried out by John McRitchie, a young traditional wood carver, and conservation students James Muldoon and Georgina Von Hof. James and Georgina will remove deteriorated paint, replace missing parts, repaint and regild. The dragons should be back by April looking sparkling and bright.





Endangered Species

Many of you will have noticed the exotic creatures that appeared in our streets in September. These were part of Jungle City, an exhibition of over a hundred brightly coloured animal sculptures, brightening up the Botanical Garden in the summer then moving to the Old and New Towns.

Placing some in the Grassmarket was a daring decision, as that location is the late night prowling ground of numbers of aggressive revellers.

Children were intrigued and adults were impressed by their somewhat unusual coloured fur or plumage applied by a number of different artists.

The creatures were part of a campaign being undertaken by the charity Elephant Family to raise funds to conserve the

Indian Elephant and to raise awareness of endangered species. Loss of habitat and disturbance has pushed these animals to dangerously low numbers.

Of course, some people would say that another endangered species is the Old Town resident. Loss of amenity makes life very difficult and frequent long treks have to be made to find the most basic foodstuffs. Late-night revellers create disturbance which can drive the Old Town residents away. The Old Town resident, however, is a resilient creature, and the population is holding up well despite the sometimes challenging environment.

The Jungle City creatures have now vanished from our streets. An auction held at the end of September, at the end of the exhibition, raised the amazing sum of £400k for animal conservation.



Second Containerisation Trial

A second trial of using communal bins for the collection of domestic refuse was carried out in locations within the World Heritage Site, including St Mary's Street and Jeffrey Street. Unlike the first trial, which was for communal refuse only, this trial has included paper and packaging recycling.

Certainly the streets have been tidier – the gulls have no easy-to-open bags to attack – and residents are not constrained by a fixed time at which to present their rubbish. The rubbish bins are frequently emptied so there is always room. There are some aspects, however, that need to be addressed.



The recycling bins were neatly placed to fit alongside the bigger communal rubbish bins. Unfortunately, this meant that to use the packaging bin, it was necessary to stand in the flow of traffic to access the lid. Once this was pointed out, however, this arrangement was stopped and it is no longer necessary to stand in the roadway to dispose of one's packaging.

There is a problem if people carry their recycling only to find the bin full. Inevitably, the lazy ones do not seek out a bin with space or take their recycling back home, but they leave it alongside, especially by bins in back courts. A few irresponsible individuals also use the bins to dump larger items. The image above right shows a mattress dumped alongside the (full) recycling bins in Gullan's Close. Not a pretty sight.



During the Festival, visitors do not differentiate between recycling and general waste and the blue and green bins are used for litter, making the contents unsuitable for recycling.

The rubbish bins are large and ugly, though less unsightly than refuse strewn across the street. They are also high. Rubbish needs to be hefted to shoulder height for disposal. The trial bins are the type without a foot pedal to open the lid, so you need one hand to hold your shopping bag or briefcase (no-one in a top flat makes a journey down the stairs just to dispose of rubbish), one for the rubbish and one to lift the lid of the container. And then you need a fourth hand to heft your rubbish. Just see the photo below of the OTA President struggling to dispose of rubbish into a communal bin.

If the trial is to become permanent, we advise that the bins are sited so they can be accessed safely, the type with a foot pedal be introduced and the bins be emptied frequently.



Litter in the High Street

The Council makes a real effort to keep the High Street litter-free, and the policy works in practice, although a minority of both residents and visitors insist on dropping cigarette ends, bits of paper, food wrappings and drink cartons in the street rather than disposing of them in a bin.

One way the streets are kept tidier is by commercial refuse being enclosed within open-topped boxes. These reduce the attacks by gulls and keeps the rubbish together.



During the Festival Fringe a number of large skips with open lids are distributed along the pavements and emptied every day. These are located in neat surrounds to improve the visual impact and doubtless make for a tidier environment than there would be otherwise.

There is a real problem during the rest of the year, however. There are only a few rather small receptacles in the High Street, discreetly placed and thus not easy to find when needed. Also, they are not adequate for the public needs as they are often full to overflowing. This doesn't provide an excuse for the litter louts, but neither does it encourage them to mend their ways. Improved facilities might well improve the situation.

There is no necessity for big bins like those in place at Festival Fringe as much of the input then consists of thousands of free handouts thrust into the hands of passers by. A scaled-down version of the Fringe provision might, however, provide a good solution. To be effective, easy-to-use bins would need to be at a significant number of clearly visible sites on both sides of the street. To be visually acceptable they would require pleasant enclosures and they would need regular emptying.

Tattoo Stands

The better facilities of the new Tattoo stands seem to have been popular with the audiences. Assembly of the stands over-ran the time schedule, not least because some of the structural steelwork was stolen from the depot and had to be replaced. Taking them down, however, scheduled to take 44 days, was actually completed in 40, despite two days being lost due to unusually high winds. This is a significantly shorter time than the old ones took, but the Ramsay Garden residents, who have officially complained about the time taken to erect and dismantle the stands, will be pleased to get some peace and quiet, at least until next summer.



Closing the Edinburgh Room

The Edinburgh Room at the Council's Central Library in George IV Bridge has been a valuable source of information on all parts of Edinburgh for many years. The staff built up and maintained a great deal of valuable knowledge about the massive collection of books, prints and other documents held there. It was with sadness that we heard that the Council had decided to close the Edinburgh Room and combine the collection with that of the Scottish Library, with a considerably reduced overall staffing level.

Overseas visitors to the Old Town

Tourist groups are a common sight in the Old Town. They are shown the famous (and infamous) features and many of the colourful traditions are recounted. Almost always in English, however, despite the broad range of countries from which the visitors come. We have a welcome newcomer. Viajar por Escocia, based at 3 Old Fishmarket Close, was set up three years ago, specialising in Spanish language tours. Four of their tours are in and around Edinburgh: these cover the Old Town west of the Bridges, Canongate and Calton Hill, Mary King's Close and finally a coach trip for dinner and music at Prestonfield House. Out of Edinburgh there are coach trips to the Highlands, points west including Loch Lomond, Stirling and Fife, and the Borders. They also arrange one-off tours for smaller groups that have particular itineraries in view.

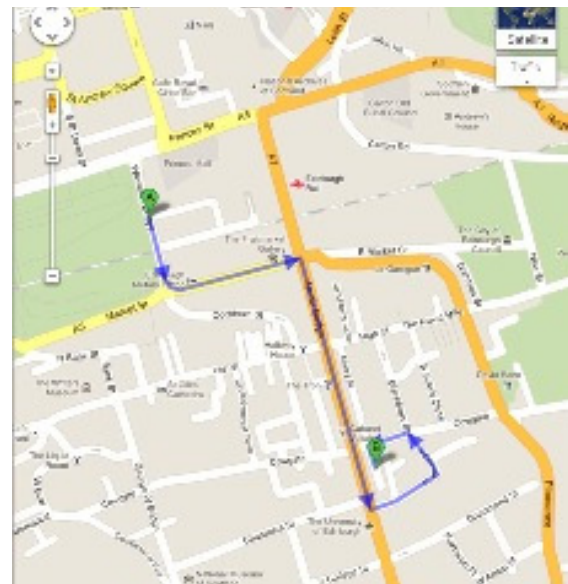
The venture is proving very successful and is now to be extended to include French, Italian and Portuguese versions as well. Edinburgh is fortunate to have many residents, temporary and permanent, who have come here from overseas, and the company has had no difficulty in recruiting enthusiastic foreign speakers to conduct their tours.

It is obviously important to ensure that overseas visitors enjoy their visits to Edinburgh and Scotland. This development is

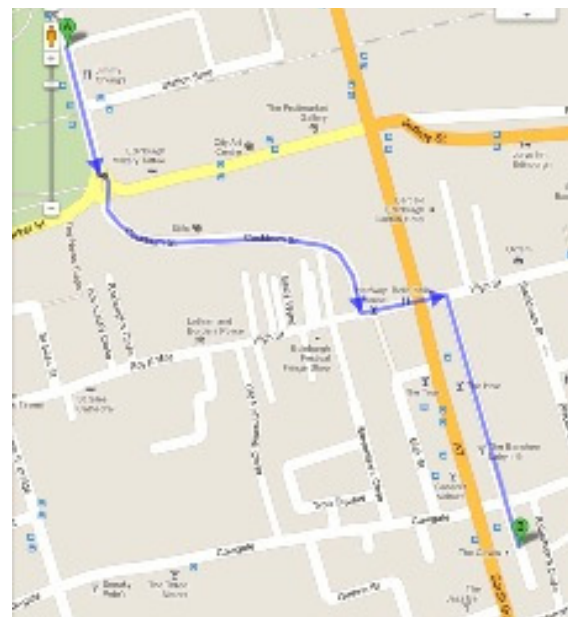
therefore to be welcomed. For further information, call in at 3 Old Fishmarket Close, or contact info@viajarporescocia.com

Flights of Fancy

In our September newsletter we mentioned people using computer-generated maps stranded in Market Street trying to get to North Bridge. To check this out, we looked at the recommended vehicle routes from Waverley Bridge to South Niddry Street. Google Maps direct you thus:



with an impossible turn from Market Street to North Bridge, though correctly avoiding a turn from South Bridge to the Cowgate. If you ask Google for the pedestrian route, however, it directs you correctly:



Microsoft's Bing Maps, on the other hand, knows about both bridges, and correctly directs you as shown opposite.

Bing offers the same correct route as Google for pedestrians.

We know computers are stupid, but can't Google teach theirs about bridges as well as one-way streets?

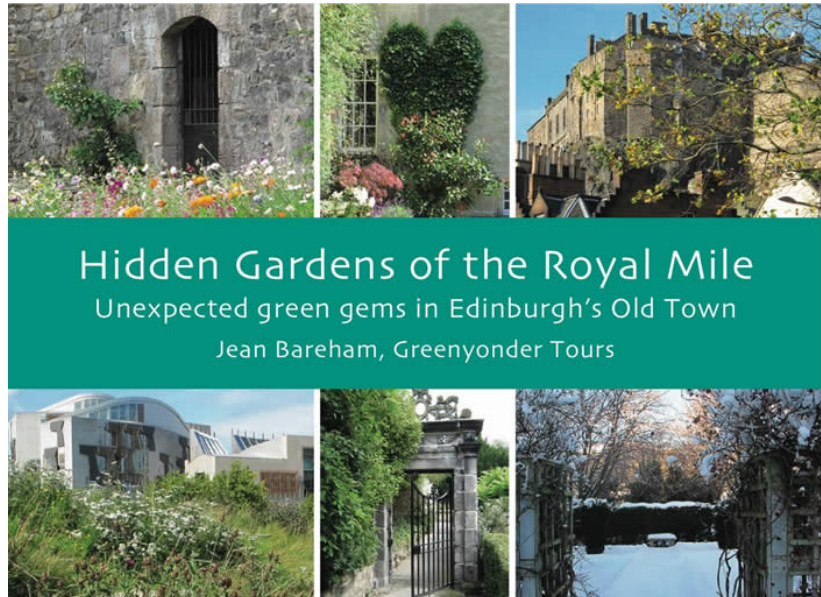


Book Review

Hidden Gardens of the Royal Mile

Jean Bareham, Green Yonder Tours

Anyone who has been around the Royal Mile during the daytime over the last couple of years will probably have seen Jean Bareham leading one of her guided tours of hidden gardens. Most of these are so well hidden that some people are sceptical whether they exist. But as Jean Bareham says in the introduction to her welcome new book: the Old Town is greening up.



The book is divided into three parts. Part One explains

where to find hidden gardens near the Royal Mile with clear directions and information about each garden. Part Two provides a broad overview of the development of the Old Town ridge from the earliest times. It concentrates on the period from the seventeenth century onwards and is particularly informative about Patrick Geddes' role in creating gardens in the Old Town. Part Three is called "Green Shoots" and includes interviews with Old Town Gardeners, a fascinating account of how the Johnston Terrace Wildlife Garden is enjoyed by children from the Cowgate Under Fives Centre, and some inspirational ideas about a green future.

This is an extremely well researched book but the research is presented in an accessible and interesting way. There are copious illustrations including some fascinating historic images and delightful views of present-day gardens. Above all, the author's knowledge and enthusiasm shine through on every page.

The Old Town Association and the Brownlee Old Town Trust contributed towards the publication of this work. The book costs £9.99 and is available from the Greenyonder website (www.greenyondertours.com), John Knox House, Blackwells or Waterstones.

OTA Activities

Queensberry House. Thursday 19 January, 7.00 pm, Quaker Meeting House. Queensberry House, now a part of the Scottish Parliament, has long been an integral part of the history of the Old Town. Jenny Colcott, who grew up there, will tell us some of the story of this important building. Members and friends welcome, tickets £3.

Scottish National Portrait Gallery. Tuesday 14 February, 2.00 pm. Join us for a tour of the newly refurbished and re-arranged Scottish National Portrait Gallery, led by a senior member of staff. Members only, tickets £4; this includes a donation to the Portrait Gallery.

Cowgate Fire Site. Thursday 8 March, 7.00 pm, Augustine United Church, 41 George IV Bridge. Proposals for the redevelopment of this site which has, justly, attracted much interest since the devastating fire of December 2002, have been well publicised. Andrew Wright will take a look at the layered history of this fascinating site which saw the first battles played out in the 1780s as to who should develop the South Bridge. Subsequent changes came from the establishment of the retail empires of the silk mercers and from the 1867 Improvement Act, by which the fabric of the Old Town was transformed in the name of slum clearance. This is a joint event with the Cockburn Association. Members and friends welcome, tickets £5.

Annual General Meeting. Monday 2 April, 7.00 pm, Scott House, 8-10 South St Andrew Street. A presentation by the staff of the Scottish Cultural Resources Access Network (SCRAN) will be followed by the AGM and wine and nibbles. Come and join us for a wee party! Tickets free.

The Committee of the Old Town Association meets monthly and is businesslike and friendly. One can get a good idea of the wide range of topics covered if you are a regular reader of the Newsletter. We can always do with new committee members; if you are interested in all aspects of life and work in the Old Town, please get in touch with us on info@eota.org.uk or by post. Contact us also if you would like an advance copy of the annual accounts.

Please remember to send a stamped addressed envelope for your tickets!

Other events and happenings

Old Edinburgh Club. Monthly talks take place in the Augustine United Church, 41 George IV Bridge at 7.00pm. Upcoming talks are:

Wednesday 18 January, Chris Fleet on The Bartholomew Archive;

Wednesday 15 February, Robert Anderson on Edinburgh Schools 1780-1880;

Wednesday 14 March, Murray Simpson on the antiquary and collector David Laing.

Tickets for non-members are £2 at the door.

Supermarket Vouchers. If you receive vouchers at Tesco and Sainsbury and don't want them to go to waste, please send them to us and we will pass them on to schools in the Old Town.

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