



Edinburgh Old Town Association Newsletter

January 2009

The visit of the UNESCO delegation to assess the state of our World Heritage Site has taken place. It was decided in advance to concentrate attention on four developments – Caltongate, the St James Centre, Haymarket and the Leith Dock proposals. Following pressure from the interested heritage and community organisations including our own, four corresponding discussion meetings were organised, chaired by Moira Tasker of the Cockburn Association. Of particular interest in the Old Town was the Caltongate meeting, and this was attended by Bill Cowan, our Planning Secretary.

The Caltongate session lasted about one and a half hours. Each of the many organisations attending was given five minutes to make a presentation. It is reported that these individual contributions presented a relatively coherent picture of the various concerns over Caltongate. The presentations were followed by a more general discussion. As well as touching on basic issues associated with design and function, other topics such as the control of vehicular traffic and shop usage were aired.

There was a feeling that the overall impression made by the heritage and community bodies on the delegation was favourable and that the comments made had been found instructive and helpful. The report of the UNESCO visitors will be awaited with great interest. They have already made it clear that World Heritage status is not at risk. We very much hope, however, that they will emphasise to the Council the need to take resolute steps to ensure that the site is carefully protected and that clear guidelines are presented to potential developers that make it absolutely clear in advance just what is being expected of them. It should be seen as a great privilege to be permitted to embark on a development in or near our World Heritage Site.

The City Archives also came under scrutiny during the visit. Edinburgh World Heritage made the improvement of them a priority item in their 2005 Management Plan, while an audit by the National Archives of Scotland was critical of the situation there, stressing the urgency to take action. Arrival of the new Administration at the City Chambers led to a change of attitude, and a Rescue Plan for the Archives was produced and put out to comment. The response has been very supportive, stressing the need for highest standards to be adopted, as befits a Capital City and a World Heritage site. To meet such

standards, however, the Council would need the courage and enthusiasm to allocate the necessary resources.

This is the Year of Homecoming. What an appropriate time for a high profile launch of a really ambitious project to produce a world class Archive Centre in Edinburgh. One suspects that such an event would do far more to enhance the reputation of our Capital and Country than tat shops, processions, saltires and bagpipes – or those overwhelming new developments that threaten our World Heritage status.

A Malaysian view of the Old Town

Between 2000 and 2002 a Malaysian artist called Ruzaimi Mat Rani studied at Edinburgh College of Art for a Masters degree. He soon encountered the attractive environment and loved the historic architecture of the Old Town. As a result he ended up making five hundred pencil sketches of what he saw. This massive collection covers the Old Town in great detail and just about every road in the Old Town is included. Curiously some of the pictures, drawn in days before the new parliament building was anything like finished and before the Cowgate fire took place, provide a valuable record of features already gone.

Ruzaimi had to work very hard to complete these works, and at the same time to undertake his studies at the College of Art before returning home to Malaysia. Since then he has found a Malaysian art gallery that is interested in taking his collection back to the United Kingdom and mounting an exhibition in Edinburgh, ideally during the Festival. The problem is to find sponsors and a suitable space for the exhibition. Can any reader advise? His email address is miandza@yahoo.com .

Panmure House and Adam Smith

The newly commissioned statue of Adam Smith has now settled happily into its location close to the Mercat Cross and is attracting daily attention from many passers-by. There is, however, further news of the great man. Panmure House in

the Canongate, where Smith lived in his latter years, has been empty for some time but was purchased by Edinburgh Business School earlier this year. EBS is a Scottish Charity with a long standing commitment to education and research – and although it operates as a separate legal entity, run by its own board of directors, it is also the Graduate School of Business of Heriot-Watt University.

The School has a major presence around the world, with over 11,000 alumni, 6,500 active postgraduate students, some 400 students on their Doctoral programme, and a wide network of academics who contribute to the learning materials and to their international teaching commitments.

The Business School is entirely self funding, and decided to use its reserves to acquire Panmure House due to its significance as the home of Adam Smith, and to restore it for use as a venue for education, economics research, charitable functions and events.

The project team has already commissioned managers and architects to produce initial plans to take forward with Scottish Heritage and the City Council. The team anticipates the research, design and approval phase will last for much of 2009, prior to restoration during 2010/2011. This appears to provide a very satisfactory use for this old building and further developments will be awaited with interest.

Papering over the Cracks

Recently a number of planning applications were made by an organisation representing a group of city centre licensed premises in partnership with the City Council and the Police for the erection of panels at locations in the city centre for use by venues advertising events. It is said that this will reduce fly posting by providing legitimate locations for posters. This we doubt as having 'official' fly posting sites will confuse the issue that fly posting is illegal and will unofficially regularise fly posting on other sites. Just as rubbish attracts more rubbish so does fly posting attract more fly posting.



But that was not our main reason for objecting. Two of the sites selected were the former United Presbyterian Church at 17-21 Blackfriars Street and the empty warehouse in King's Stables Road. Empty and derelict buildings (and gap sites) should not be 'prettified' or made respectable. Pressure must be maintained to solve the problem of the dereliction; and such pressure may be reduced if a building is given any 'cosmetic' treatment. Fixing panels for posters to façades will give

these buildings a spurious function and their owners a potential (if small) income, thus reducing the chances of the building being found a proper economic use.

The money for the poster panels would be better spent fixing the gutters (totally blocked, and in our photo, growing grass long enough to make hay) or sorting the fundamental problem of the derelict buildings. What is proposed (and, we regret to report, given consent) is papering over the cracks.

The City Council and Property Maintenance

In June last year we had a presentation by the council's Property Conservation section describing their activities. They provide a most valuable service within the city and it was considered well worth while to produce an article in the newsletter for those who missed the talk.

Edinburgh has a very large number of privately owned and relatively old tenement properties, a unique situation in Scotland. Whilst these buildings add to the city's architectural history and atmosphere, there is a great need to ensure the housing is properly maintained. The City is fortunate to have unique legislation in place that allows the Council a greater ability to assist owners proactively with repairs to common areas: roof, walls, guttering, down pipes and drainage up to the point where it connects to the sewer. Each year, the Council handles around 6000 requests for help and carries out repairs on behalf of joint owners worth approximately £15 million.

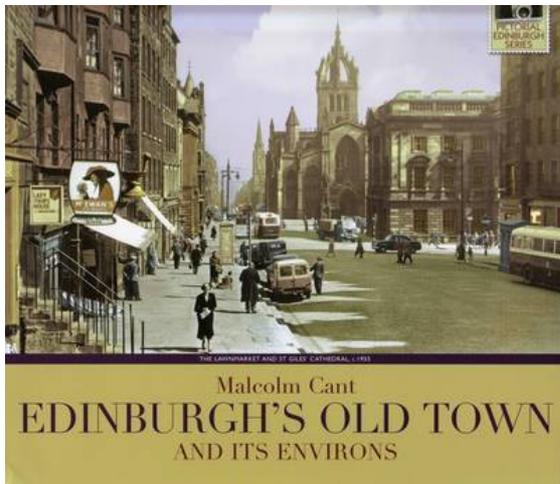
In cases of emergency, and this includes defective waste pipes, the Council will attend, organise contractors and recover costs from the liable owners by retrospective Statutory Notice. Where properties are of significant conservation value, financial assistance may be available from either Historic Scotland or from Edinburgh World Heritage.

To request assistance or report a dangerous structure, contact Property Conservation on 0131 529 4594 during office hours (0131 200 2000 at any other time) or by email at property.conservation@edinburgh.gov.uk.

Two Book Reviews

Edinburgh's Old Town and its Environs by Malcolm Cant

Published by Malcolm Cant, 2008,
ISBN 095524871X



The latest in Malcolm Cant's Pictorial Edinburgh series looks at Edinburgh's Old Town and its environs through historical photographs (and a few prints). These are not just images of buildings, fascinating though those are, but also of interiors, and the people who lived here and their work and pastimes. Mr Cant takes us on a journey down the Royal Mile from the Castle to the Palace, then back along Holyrood Road and the Cowgate to the Grassmarket and ending with Bristo, Lauriston and Tollcross.

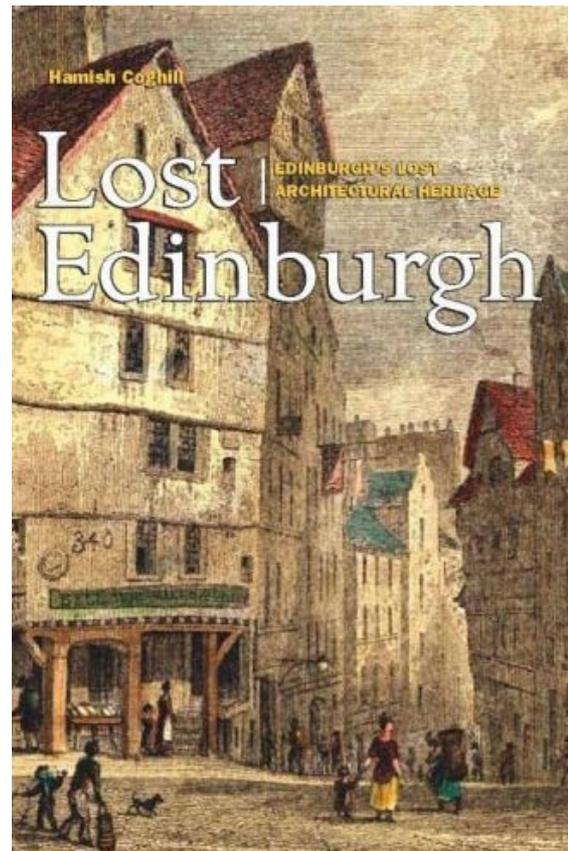
This is no misty-eyed nostalgia-fest; as well as the happy faces at jubilees, there are images of dosshouses, the squalor of mouldering tenements, and pre-health-and-safety work conditions. He shows you progressions through the centuries: the glassworks on Holyrood Road are illustrated, then the tenements that

followed (incorporating the glassworkers' panels), and finally the panels are shown in their present location in the walls of a hotel. This is social, economic and architectural history in a few telling images supported by well-researched and well-selected facts.

This is a book that illuminates Edinburgh's Old Town and brings its history to life. It is a book for residents and also to give to visitors as a memento of our wonderful town. Illustration by courtesy of the Malcolm Cant Collection.

Lost Edinburgh by Hamish Coghill

Published by Birlinn, 2008,
ISBN 1841587478



Malcolm Cant's Edinburgh's Old Town gives an introduction to our city and its history, Hamish Coghill's Lost Edinburgh introduces its readers to deep (and sometimes dark) corners of its development. Mr Coghill takes us on a

journey from earliest times to the present, showing us how Edinburgh grew and evolved through its buildings as they rose and fell (through catastrophe, neglect or demolition). Using historical images and extracts from contemporary accounts we are taken through turbulent times with the forces of invasion, fire, religious upheaval, transport revolutions, population growth and the efforts of town planners all changing Edinburgh – for better or worse. Mr Coghill does not confine himself to developments that took place, he also touches on post-war planning and the visions for Edinburgh that never came to pass.

This is a book to be taken slowly, with reading interspersed with plenty of walks:

Christopher Fyfe 1920-2008

To the world, Christopher Fyfe was a historian of West Africa, in particular, Sierra Leone. To Edinburgh, and especially the Old Town, Chris Fyfe was one of that select band of activists who stopped the city centre being ripped apart by roads. Incredulity is the response if mention is made to anyone under the age of 40 or to any incomer that Edinburgh was once threatened with an inner ring road that would have ploughed through the Southside and the Old Town, and tunnelled under Waterloo Place to emerge at a roundabout at the top of Leith Walk. But the evidence is there: the size of the space at the top of Leith Walk was to accommodate a massive interchange; the curve of the 1960s block in Calton Road next to Regent Bridge is to smooth the traffic flow round Calton Hill, and all that post-1970s housing in St Leonards fills the gaps left by mass demolition in advance of the dual carriageway.

Chris came to Edinburgh in 1962 as a lecturer in African History at the University of Edinburgh. Looking for a place to stay, he selected the Old Town and found a flat in St Mary's Street that was threatened with a compulsory purchase order. Chris then set about stopping the road that was threatening not just his flat but the community in which he had chosen to live. He founded the St Mary's Street Association (now, ironically, an association concerned with residents' parking) and was a founder of the Old Town Association (he was its Chairman for ten years in the 1980s). Through these bodies he lobbied and fought and campaigned against the destruction of buildings and people's lives. His determination won and the road scheme was stopped.

Chris was a modest man, in every way – modest in height (most people overtopped him), modest in speech (he never dominated meetings), and modest about his successes (he was offered a Chair by the University, but turned it down) – but his achievements were towering. He gained some recognition for his work for the Old Town in the second series of the television programme *Restoration*, when he was interviewed about the road plans for Edinburgh, illustrated by a graphic of an enormous pencil cutting a swathe through the top of the Canongate. Without Christopher Fyfe, that nightmare vision would have been real. Chris, we owe you so much. Thank you.

not just to clear the head but to see on the ground the physical remains of what once was, or of what might have been. As a commentary on the history of Edinburgh, this is a book to savour.

Single, but not Singular

A topic that has been providing amusement at convivial gatherings in the Old Town is the report from Sheffield University that Holyrood is the loneliest place in Britain. Yes, Holyrood might have a high number of single households, but that just makes it easy to go out and be sociable; something that the great variety of activity in the Old Town makes remarkably easy. Sheffield, we suggest you change your criteria for what constitutes loneliness.

OTA Winter Activities

Robert Burns and the Old Town. Monday January 19th., 6.30pm, St. Giles Cathedral., South Door, via the restaurant. Enjoy a talk by Dr. Donald Smith, Director of the Scottish Storytelling Centre, on the time Burns spent in our city. This will be followed by a party with wine & nibbles - as opposed to a proper Burns Supper! Members only – numbers limited. Tickets £5.

Family History Research. Tuesday 17th February, 6.30 - 9.00pm. Records Office, New Register House, 2 Princes Street. Take this opportunity to use the vast resources of the Records Office to make a start on researching your own family history - or to take it further, if you have already done so! Bring as much information as you already have in order to get the most out of the evening. The staff will be on hand to help, but you will need your own basic information, so double check old family names & addresses if you can - the more you already know, the more you will get out of the visit. All welcome. Tickets £10. (This is the charge determined by the Records Office)

Members' Meeting and Lecture: Public Space And Public Life. Monday 23rd March, 7.00pm Quaker Meeting House, Victoria Terrace. This is your chance to meet the Committee and put questions on current issues. The meeting will be preceded by an illustrated talk by Ian Wall, former Chief Executive of The EDI Group, on how public spaces work for residents, looking at schemes famous and infamous in Edinburgh and beyond. Members only – numbers limited. No charge, but please let us know if you are coming to give us an idea of numbers.

City Of Edinburgh Council CCTV Centre. Wednesday 1st. April, Wednesday 8th April or Wednesday 15th April, 6.30 pm - City Chambers, High Street. Join us to see how the cameras which watch over the city centre work and what they track. Space in the centre is very limited, numbers are limited to a maximum 15 per visit, so please bear with us if we ask you if you might be able to change dates. Members only. Tickets £4.

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

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