



Edinburgh Old Town Association Newsletter

September 2011

A welcome interest has recently been taken by the City Council in addressing the deteriorating environment in Edinburgh's Old Town. The intention is to tackle pavement obstruction, excessive advertising, loudspeaker noise and busking. It remains to be seen just how effective the Council's efforts will prove to be, but in the absence of clear statutory penalties, they will have an uphill task. With such penalties in place, enforcement would inevitably be simpler and less expensive.

These improvements would certainly be of advantage both to tourists and inhabitants, but there are more fundamental problems that require attention. These concern the retail environment. Bill Cowan, Planning Secretary to the Old Town Association's Committee, has recently given detailed consideration to the topic and has created a report for the Old Town Community Council. Bill, incidentally is ideally suited to be involved as he has built up an extensive experience of Planning and Licensing matters, and has retail interests of his own in the Old Town as well.

The report was received with great interest. The report concludes that the retail offering in the Old Town has reached a new low, with conventional retail displaced by restaurants and sandwich bars. The range of goods available to our visitors is very limited, whilst residents now have to travel out of the area to buy many types of goods. Examples are given: George IV Bridge contains only one solitary paper shop amongst fifteen food and drink operations, while the Grassmarket has sixteen shops but twenty-seven food and drink establishments.

As with other Old Town problems, controls are inadequate. The report suggests that these need to be strengthened in three ways:

Firstly, by better control of the number of food outlets. The use classes for commercial premises are too broad and enforcement is weak. For example six such outlets in the Grassmarket are classed as retail premises, with food reheating permitted but no cooking, no table service and seating for no more than eight. In practice they are providing cooked meals with full table service to large numbers of tables. Again 'Ancillary use' is exploited. For example a 'photographic gallery' has permission to operate an ancillary juice bar. In practice it is a café with table service and a few neglected photographs on the wall.

Planning consent is not strict enough in the conditions imposed. A classic example was the permission granted for a licensed 50-bed apart-hotel, that finally appeared with complete impunity as a 200-bed drinkers' hostel. Consents could be strengthened in the way that liquor licences now function, with detailed conditions specific to each individual site and backed by prescribed penalties.

A second approach would be to seek ways to encourage quality retailers to set up in the Old Town. Large sums of money were 'invested' into Princes Street and George Street to re-invigorate them, only for the effect to be negated by building large shopping centres both in and outside the city centre. Some investment in the Old Town could be far more successful, encouraging in new retailers and supporting existing retailers who need help.

Bill's full report, containing more detail and more ideas can be consulted on the Old Town Association's website (www.eota.org.uk/OldTownRetail.pdf).

Safe as Houses?

Car owners understand and accept that routine inspection and maintenance is required to ensure that their vehicle is safe to be on the road. As a car is an expensive possession, this is good sense. So why don't house owners give the same consideration to their most valuable possession: their home? Below is a selection of photographs of occupied residential property within a short distance of the Netherbow.



Fig 1: tree in gutter

In fig 1, enough muck has accumulated in this gutter to provide soil for a wee tree. That the gutter is blocked is shown by the water staining on the masonry.



Fig 2: blocked downpipe

In fig 2, the downpipe is blocked with grass so rainwater washes down the façade, This has washed out the pointing and provided a gap for a fern to take root. If roots of fern, buddleia, birch or whatever penetrate masonry, a route for water is created, which can lead to damp and rot.

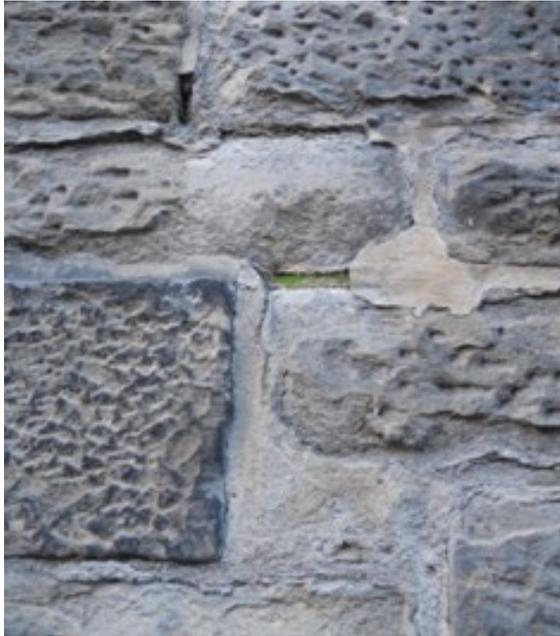


Fig 3: inappropriate cement mortar on masonry built with lime mortar

Before about 1900 most buildings, including most tenements, were built of stone bonded with vapour-permeable lime mortar. Repairs, however, are often carried out in impermeable cement mortar. The natural movement of water in and out of the masonry is forced to occur within the stone instead of the joint, leading to stone decay (fig 3).

Cement render does not 'breathe', so moisture builds up behind an apparently water-proof coating, making the house cold and damp. The render can become detached from the masonry and will eventually fall off, exposing the stone to the weather (fig 4).



Fig 4: detached cement render on lime-built wall

Houses built in concrete or in masonry bonded with cement mortar are not immune to maintenance problems. With soft lime mortar, minor movement within a building, from micro-settling or through thermal expansion and contraction, is accommodated; cement mortar cracks. In fig 5, a crack has developed below a vent, water can penetrate even the narrowest crack. At the bottom of the photo, the crack is wide enough for the mortar to have fallen out, leaving a gap most inviting to vermin.

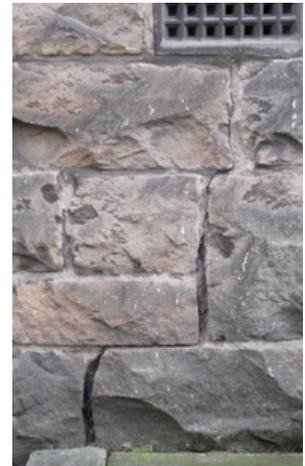


Fig 5: cracked and missing cement mortar



Fig 6: flaking masonry paint

Modern masonry paints cannot survive constant wetness. In fig 6, a poorly detailed downpipe is soaking the wall, leading to flaking of the exterior paint. The underlying cement render is cracked and water will be penetrating.

All the buildings photographed are occupied; there is no excuse for a lack of maintenance. Go on, have a look at your own home – a look through field glasses from ground-level will catch most problems. A small amount of money spent regularly on maintenance saves massive bills on major repairs. Car owners are legally obliged to have maintenance checks on their cars; we don't want compulsion for buildings, just good sense.



Above and Below: New Tattoo stands with Ramsay Garden behind

Sitting in stands

The old stands at the Castle Esplanade were in use for thirty five years. They have now been replaced by new ones providing much improved facilities. The total number of seats has increased slightly but the main emphasis has been on comfort. The new ones are of moulded plastic, are wider and provide increased knee room. Also there are more for those of limited mobility, accessed by gentle ramps.

The new stands are designed for more rapid assembly than the old ones, which took ten to twelve weeks. This improvement involved the manufacture of large steel components to a high degree of accuracy. Teething troubles, not the least, the theft of completed steel units stored off-site, caused delays. The contractors intend to employ the same team in future years and they are confident that from now on they will be able to meet the new design time of six weeks.



Simon Bolam, Secretary of the Ramsay Garden Residents Association reports that the Tattoo and Contractor's have maintained a close and continuing

relationship with the residents, from the planning stage onwards. It was freely acknowledged that the old stands, in service for so long, required replacement. The back of the new stand comes closer to the residents' flats, but on the other hand, the gap between the old north and east stands meant that members of the public sitting in the north stand could see right into their flats. The new arrangement consists of one continuous structure with no gaps at the corners so privacy will be greatly improved. The residents would like to see the noise levels during construction and disassembly reduced in future years.



The stone setts on Castlehill are in a poor state of repair. Can we hope that they will soon be relaid as they are letting the scene down now?



Sense and nonsense

Residents in the Netherbow area were pleased to be informed that the collapsing sections of roadway in the lower High Street were to be repaired. But the letter informing us of the imminent start of the remedial works caused not a little bemusement. The letter, from Scottish Water, told us of the works, the start date and the probable duration. It then went on to say that, in consultation with the City Council and The Police, a diversion for traffic had been arranged using Jeffrey Street and North Bridge Street (sic).

It would puzzle any driver to turn from Jeffrey Street into North Bridge. We are used to rescuing visitors standing in Market Street puzzling over their computer-generated maps sending them on a similar route, but surely the City Council, The Police and Scottish Water would be expected to know the topography of the Old Town? It is astonishing that these bodies, responsible for our streets, do not know the basic layout.

More worryingly, the sense of one-way section at the top of Blackfriars Street was reversed for the duration of the remedial works. Visitors (who look at road signs) and taxi drivers (who are aware) drove down, but habitual users of this route (who obviously do not look at road signs) continued to drive up. Head-to-head confrontations were inevitable. This reversal of sense probably made sense on paper, but, like the letter, made no sense in reality.

Another daft traffic arrangement. There is no notice at St Giles Street to tell drivers that the High Street to the east of the City Chambers is closed off by the rising bollards after 10.30 am. The result is several coaches and long lorries each day having to reverse back up the street in order to turn at St Giles Street. This is a particularly dangerous procedure, especially with so many tourists wandering around.

Revolution in Chambers Street

Many of us have been familiar with the old part of the National Museum of Scotland with its fine 1860s design. In younger days, one bounded up the broad flight of steps to enter the principal ground floor. In later years you begin to appreciate the problem of access for the less mobile. Beneath this 'ground' floor is an extra vaulted level which used to be used as a storage area for exhibits. New facilities have now been found for these elsewhere, offsite, and in future the public will enter the museum at this level directly from Chambers Street. There they will find a reception area, with a restaurant to one side and a gift shop to the other.



Photo courtesy of the National Museums Scotland

They will then be able to ascend by lift or stairs to the principal floor, and onwards to the upper levels by stairs, lift or escalator. The new layout has freed up a great deal of additional space for the display of items from the large national collection. Some of these, of the very highest quality, have not been on view by the public for many years. Scottish items obviously have a strong presence, but the collection is truly international in scope, as befits a museum of international standard. The museum is obviously of interest to adults, but new sections have been designed for younger visitors (and their parents) which provide the sort of interaction that will encourage 'finding out'.

The upgrade of the building started in Summer 2008 with an estimated cost of £46.4 million. Of this, £33.8 million was covered by grants, leaving £12.6 million to raise from private donations. This amount was reached and exceeded, and the work was finished in July, on time and well within budget.

World Heritage Young Guides

In July, the Brownlee Old Town Trust was happy to support a project led by Donald Smith of the Scottish Storytelling Centre and David Hicks of Edinburgh World Heritage to train a small group of youngsters as Tour Guides for the World Heritage Site. They were taken on a trail of possible sites in the Canongate and the stories to which they are connected, and went on to research these and prepare their own talks.



The Young Guides rose to the occasion magnificently, despite the clamour, traffic and tourists surrounding them, and on one occasion being upstaged by a passing cute wee dog! A couple of their chosen talks were very unusual, and we all learned a lot. The youngsters were given an insight into the history of the Old Town which they will hopefully retain as they mature. In

addition, the challenge to stand in front of a large group having researched and rehearsed their script must be a terrifying thought but a great confidence booster, especially once it is over and a positive response received.

The Brownlee was represented by Naomi Richardson (official capacity: librarian and research assistant, unofficial role: supporting singer!).

A good time was had by all, and the consensus from the organisers and audience was that this is an enterprise very well worth pursuing – and it is hoped that this pilot will lead to greater things.

Willow Cottage

The Cowgate Under-5s Centre was again targeted by vandals, and the lovely Wendy House – Willow Cottage – suffered serious damage. The Old Town Association was pleased to be able offer a donation towards the repair and restoration, and Convener Barbara Logue and Treasurer Rosemary Mann were happy to attend the ceremony which saw the children able to reclaim their lovely house.



OTA Convener (right) and Treasurer (left) at the re-opening of Willow Cottage



The ceremony was linked with a party to celebrate the receipt by the Cowgate Under-5s Centre of an ‘Investing in Children’s Service award, the first in Scotland. Congratulations! A good time was had by all, adults and children alike.

Time Travel

Despite all our grouches and complaints, many Old Town residents do survive to a ripe old age. Things got out of perspective the other day however, when one of our members looked out of a window and saw a scene which he quickly captured with his camera.



His relief was considerable when he discovered that filming was going on for Series 3 of Garrow’s Law – the TV series about an 18th century lawyer.



Additions to our World Heritage Site:

Our leading article provides a clear analysis of the deterioration of quality of the Old Town retail offering. A perfect example is provided by recent changes in Bank Street and round the corner in North Bank Street. In the former, the large shop which for a number of decades has housed a jeweller has recently turned into – guess what – probably the largest tat shop yet! As with all these nuisances, the outside is bedecked with merchandise which also spreads about a third of the way across the pavement, which is narrow and hemmed in by railings there.



Now go around the corner where there used to be a bank (2 units), an art shop (2 units) and a clothes shop (1 unit). We now have a café/bar (1 unit) a bar (3 units) and the clothes shop no longer sells clothes that you or I would wear. The bar will doubtless help to keep tourists and locals alike in a full state of inebriation, particularly as it has a licence to stay open until 1.00 am.



Come on Council – you have been talking about these problems for years. Now **do something about them.**

Oh yes, and a note for our councillors: remember that there are council elections coming up in May 2012; I'm sure that many of us will. We will be looking for real action meanwhile.

Scotsman Steps

In our previous newsletter (April 2011), we mentioned the restoration of the Scotsman Steps. In an artwork by Turner Prize-winning artist Martin Creed, each step and landing has been paved in a different marble. Some of you will be interested to see the list of all 105 marbles used and where they come from:

Martin Creed Work No. 1059, 2011

From bottom to top (L is landing)	35	Bardiglio Fiorito [Italy]	70	Picasso Brown [India]
L0 Black Forest Gold, [Pakistan]	36	Rosa Tea [Turkey]	71	Violita [Italy]
1 Bianco Gioia [Italy]	37	Emperador Dark [Spain]	72	Veselye Unito [Croatia]
2 Pierre Bleu [Belgium]	38	Azul Bahia [Brazil]	73	Bardiglio Nuvolato [Italy]
3 Picasso Green Light [India]	39	Pinta Verde [Brazil]	74	Rosa Sabrina [Iran]
4 Fior di Pesco Carnico [Italy]	40	Nero Lakis [Greece]	75	Midas Gold [Turkey]
L5 Rosso Alicante [Spain]	41	Giallo Silvia Oro Medio [Egypt]	76	Rosso Amaranto Dark [Italy]
6 Arabescato Carrara [Italy]	42	Calacatta Vagli [Italy]	77	Repen [Italy]
7 Pietra del Cardoso [Italy]	43	Irish Green [Ireland]	78	Verde Italia [Italy]
8 Crema Valencia [Spain]	44	Giallo Provenza [Morocco]	L79	Azul Cielo [Argentina]
9 Lipica Unito [Slovenia]	L45	Bianco Laser [Afghanistan]	80	Giallo Daniel [Guatemala]
L10 Calacatta Oro Vagli [Italy]	46	Grey Saint Laurent [Italy]	81	Paonazzo [Italy]
11 Rosso Verona [Italy]	47	Rosa Jasmine [India]	82	Lipica Fiorito [Slovenia]
12 Verde Jasmine [India]	48	Chocolate [China]	L83	Rosso Lepanto [Turkey]
13 Giallo Siena [Italy]	49	Bianco Sivec [Macedonia]	84	Trani [Italy]
14 Brown Fossil [Morocco]	50	Pietra Ducale [Italy]	85	Piasentina [Italy]
15 Breccia Sarda [Italy]	51	Arabescato Grigio Orobico [Italy]	86	Bianco Namibia [Namibia]
16 Nero Belgio [Belgium]	52	Rosa Corallo [Italy]	87	Nero Marquina [Spain]
L17 Rosa Norvegia [Norway]	53	Fantasy Gold [India]	88	Sunset Gold [Lebanon]
18 Grafite [Iran]	L54	Breccia Venezia [Italy]	89	Verde Gressoney [Italy]
19 Giallo D'Oriente [Turkey]	55	Lapislazuli [Bolivia]	90	Breccia Capraia [Italy]
20 Grigio Tao [Tunisia]	L56	Playa Stone [Croatia]	91	Verde Acquamarine [India]
21 Rosso Daniel [Spain]	57	Ebano [Tunisia]	92	Rosso Levante [Italy]
L22 Fior di Pesco Fantastico [Italy]	58	Botticino Fiorito Dark [Italy]	L93	Giallo Reale Giallo [Italy]
23 Giallo Reale Rosato [Italy]	59	Verde Lemon [Greece]	94	Rosso Inferno [Italy]
24 Arabescato Rosso Orobico [Italy]	60	Nero Michaelangelo [Pakistan]	95	Fior Di Crema [Bosnia Herzegovina]
25 Botticino Classico [Italy]	61	Rosa Peralba [Italy]	L96	Picasso Green Dark [India]
26 Fossil Green [Turkey]	62	Pietra Orsera [Italy]	97	Giallo d'Istria [Croatia]
27 Arancio di Selva [Italy]	63	Breccia Damacata [Italy]	98	Grigio Antracite [Italy]
28 Caramel [Brazil]	64	Verde Rolex [Greece]	99	Verde Pavone [Iran]
29 Breccia Aurora [Italy]	65	Picasso Gold [India]	100	Rosso Asiago [Italy]
30 Nero Portoro [Italy]	L66	Grigio Carnico [Italy]	101	Bianco Carrara C [Italy]
L31 Verde Giada [China]	67	Terrasanta [Italy]	102	Verde Guatemala / Imperiale [India]
32 Rosa Flavia [Egypt]	L68	Rosso Francia [France]	103	Silivia Oro [Egypt]
33 Crema Imperiale [France]	69	Rosa Portogallo Dark [Portugal]	L104	Azul Macaubas [Brazil]
L34 Breccia Paradiso [Italy]				

Commissioned by The Fruitmarket Gallery as part of a refurbishment of the Scotsman Steps by the City of Edinburgh Council and the Edinburgh World Heritage Trust.

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Autumn Activities 2011

Enlightenment Tour of the Royal Mile. Monday 5th September, 6.30 pm. Meet at David Hume's statue, Lawnmarket. Angus Gillon will lead us on an informal guided walking tour, illuminating one of Scotland's most important historical periods and the circumstances that gave rise to some of Scotland's intellectual giants, including Adam Smith, David Hume, and others. Come and be enlightened!

This is a repeat of the June tour. Members' guests welcome, numbers limited, tickets £7

Members' Meeting and talk: Of Grave Concern? Monday 12th September, 7pm. Quaker Meeting House, Victoria Terrace. A talk by Dr Susan Buckham on The Edinburgh Graveyards Project, exploring options for the future management and sustainable use of five historic Edinburgh graveyards. The Members' Meeting which will follow is your chance to question and raise concerns with the Committee.

Members' guests welcome. No charge, but please apply for tickets as usual.

The Scottish Cemetery in Calcutta. Wednesday, 28th September, 7 pm. Augustine United Church, George IV Bridge. Join us to learn about the renovation of this currently derelict site. Architect James Simpson presents the plans for restoration, creation of green space, setting up a database of its information, and establishing training courses. This is a joint event with the Cockburn Association.

Members' guests welcome, tickets £5

CEC Museums Collections, Broughton Market (end of Barony St). Wednesday 12th October 2 pm and 6 pm. Conservation Officer Paul McAuley will take us on a tour of the reserve collection of the City Council Museums Department containing many interesting items.

Members' guests welcome. Numbers limited, tickets £3

Festival Theatre backstage tour. Friday 4th November, 2.30 pm. Join us at the front of house for a backstage tour of the Festival Theatre, the longest continuous theatre site in Edinburgh. Tread the boards of the biggest stage in Scotland and join the illustrious company of Pavarotti and Francie and Josie!

Members' guests welcome, tickets £4

Tour of St Cecilia's Hall and its collections. Saturday 3rd December, 11 am. From the biggest theatre stage to the oldest - take this opportunity to visit this beautiful oval concert hall in Niddry Street, opened in 1763, and enjoy it and its wonderful collection of historical musical instruments.

Members' guests welcome, tickets £4

Apply for tickets on enclosed ticket form

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

Other events and happenings

Riding of the Marches (<http://www.edinburghridingthemarches.co.uk/route.html>) Sunday 11th September. Finishes on the Royal Mile.

Doors Open Days: Saturday 24th & Sunday 25th September. Your annual opportunity to see inside interesting and unusual buildings not usually open to the public. Leaflet available from your local library.

Historic Scotland. Free weekend entry to Edinburgh Castle. Dates as yet unconfirmed but usually around St Andrews Day.