



Edinburgh Old Town Association Newsletter

January 2016

A Happy New Year to all our readers! 2016 is a significant year for the Old Town Association as it sees the 40th anniversary of our foundation in 1976. In this edition we look at some of the things that were happening at the start of that year and in later editions during 2016 we will look at events throughout 1976. If any readers have memories of Edinburgh in 1976 and particularly of the early days of the Association we would be very interested to hear them. We are also interested in views on what the Association might do to mark the 40th anniversary. We marked our 25th anniversary in 2001 by buying a seat, currently on the High Street just east of the City Chambers. What, if anything, should we do in 2016?

One very appropriate way of marking the anniversary would be to boost our membership. We hope that members feel that belonging to the Association is worthwhile to them as individuals. Certainly the more members the Association has the more effectively it can make its voice heard in discussions with the City Council and other decision makers. Our membership currently stands at 258. If during 2016 each member could persuade someone they know to join us then we could end the anniversary year with a membership of over 500 which would be a great achievement.

This edition contains the usual mixture of updates on things happening in and around the Old Town and information about forthcoming events run by the Association and others. And the photo essay this time celebrates the variety of three-dimensional signs that adorn our streets.

'Tis forty years since ...

... to misquote the sub-title of Walter Scott's *Waverley*. Looking back at the start of 1976, it is remarkable both how many things have changed and how many seem familiar. Mrs Thatcher was marking the first anniversary of becoming leader of the Conservative party. Both she and Prime Minister Harold Wilson faced party splits over Europe. The newspapers were speculating about Chancellor of the Exchequer Dennis Healey's plans for the economy (inflation was running at 16.5%) and whether Northern Ireland Secretary Merlyn Rees could avert civil war in the Province. There were rumours of a rescue deal for the Linwood car factory where production of the Hillman Imp was coming to an end (the factory closed for good in 1981). Closer to home, Rollerball and Jaws were playing in Edinburgh cinemas; Patrick Thomson's department store on North Bridge was advertising a sale with men's suits at £29.90 and ladies' skirt suits for £11.95; Lothian Regional Council hoped to recruit a Chief Administrative Officer in their Department of

Architectural Services at a salary between £6,063 and £7,632; Asda were advertising for a manager/ess at £2,550 per annum. Stockbridge Community Council announced they would oppose plans for student flats in Raeburn Place saying that the community had already been disrupted by the introduction of a large student population. A report from officials was before Lothian Regional Council recommending that plans for an eastern link road be scrapped. This was the last surviving element of a grandiose 1960s scheme for a six-lane inner city bypass running through, among other places, Inverleith Park and the Meadows. The eastern link would have followed the line of the Pleasance and St Mary's Street with a large, two-level roundabout south of Waverley Station and a tunnel under Calton Hill. The plan was finally dropped in 1977.

Calton Hill – the future?

If the eastern link road had gone ahead it would have had a disastrous effect on views of Calton Hill from the Old Town. As we reported in the September 2015 Newsletter, there were new threats to that view with the proposal to redevelop the old Royal High School site as a luxury hotel with new blocks either side of Thomas Hamilton's iconic neo-classical building. That proposal was considered by the City Council's Planning Committee on 17 December.

At the meeting strong views were expressed on both sides. Our councillor Joanna Mowat set out the arguments against approving the application. The committee followed the advice of officials and refused the application. Let's hope this opens the way for a more sensitive and appropriate use of the site.

Let there be light?



In 1976 Edinburgh's Hogmanay celebrations were still pretty much limited to the traditional venue around the Tron Kirk. If one of that year's revellers could have been

transported forward to Christmas 2015 they would have been amazed at the spectacle confronting them – and would probably have instantly sworn off the booze. Stretching up the High Street from the Tron Kirk was the Virgin Money Street of Light, described by its promoters as a breath-taking new architectural installation of over 60,000 lights synchronised to music sung by choirs from across Edinburgh. Others saw it with its in-your-face corporate branding as a tacky and inappropriate intrusion on the Old Town. The Association's convener has written to our councillors expressing concern, particularly at the apparent lack of consultation before the project went ahead. We don't object in principle to new festive attractions in the area but we think it is important to give due consideration to their appropriateness to the World Heritage site and their likely impact on people who live and work there.

Let there be more light?

Edinburgh World Heritage has launched the Twelve Closes Project intended to bring a series of bespoke improvements to selected Old Town closes, including new artwork, lighting and interpretation, to encourage greater use by the public. A demonstration lighting event was held in Bakehouse Close on 26 and 27 November and showed that artistic and architectural lighting could indeed transform the closes. The final selection of closes is under discussion and EWH say that local communities will play a crucial role in the project, researching the history of the closes to provide ideas and design inspiration for their presentation. More information can be found at <http://www.ewht.org.uk/news/542/102/Twelve-Closes-Project-to-Light-Up-the-Old-Town>.

Riddle's Court

In our last edition we mentioned that the contract was about to be let for this historic building's transformation into the Patrick Geddes Centre. Russell Clegg of the Scottish Historic Buildings Trust provides an update on what has happened since then:

The Scottish Historic Building Trust's project to redevelop Riddle's Court on the Lawnmarket as the Patrick Geddes Centre, a space in the heart of the Old Town for learning, events, meetings and occasions, has commenced.

Work began on the site in the summer of 2015. LDN architects, who are designing the new centre, CFA Archaeology, who are documenting finds and discoveries in the building and John Dennis, the contractor, are the key players as we move into the construction phase of the project.

Hoardings have been erected at both the Lawnmarket and on Victoria Terrace. For those interested in hearing about how work is progressing, along with updates on the archaeological and historical finds on site, regular bulletins are being posted on the hoardings.



Newly discovered fireplace. Photo: Louise Mather

On 26th September, SHBT welcomed 166 visitors on special hard-hat tours of the site as part of The Cockburn Association's Annual Edinburgh Doors Open Day programme. Tours were led by architects, engineers and the site archaeologist with each guide focussing on his or her own particular input and insight into the project. At that point we were able to show visitors the emerging space for the lift, an interior cobbled courtyard and a

vast 16th century fireplace, uncovered in the space that once housed the ground floor ladies' WC.

Both of the historic painted ceilings in the building have been concealed behind conservation paper to protect them from ongoing works – conservators will be attending to them in the coming months.

In an exciting development, additional painted beams have been found in the access space adjacent to the 'King's Room' – as it has become known on site – leading site experts to believe that the banquet attended by James VI and Anne of Denmark, extended into both rooms.

Following Doors Open Day, a further find, possibly relating to the 1598 banquet, has been uncovered in the arched late 16th century fireplace. This caused quite a stir within the conservation team as the removal of the interior fireplace revealed a well preserved bread oven and salt press leading to a debate as to whether aspects of the royal feast had been prepared and cooked in this area.



Child's tin cup.

Photo: SHBT

In terms of human ephemera and personal effects found on site, a rather enchanting tin cup belonging to a child, or perhaps once part of a larger tea set, and decorated with nursery rhyme motif has been unearthed as have several empty packets of 'Players' cigarettes – the brand of choice for an earlier generation? An unusual '3-toed' distemper brush is another recently found artefact.

Future events around the Riddle's Court project are in development including at least

two study days in the spring and summer of 2016 the themes and content of which are to be confirmed. Further public access tours of the site will take place in the New Year. For anyone who would like to attend one of these please get in touch by email: Learning@shbt.org.uk and you can follow our progress at: <http://www.shbt.org.uk/>.

Panmure House

Another historic Old Town building which is currently undergoing renovation for a new use is Panmure House off the Canongate. The Edinburgh Business School recently announced that funding has now been made available to undertake the final phase of the project which will see Adam Smith's Edinburgh home open as a living memorial to the father of modern economics and a celebration of the Scottish Enlightenment. It is anticipated that the successful contractors and their team will start work on site in early April 2016. Completion of the building works and the fitting out of the building are programmed for the early autumn of 2017.

3-D Joy

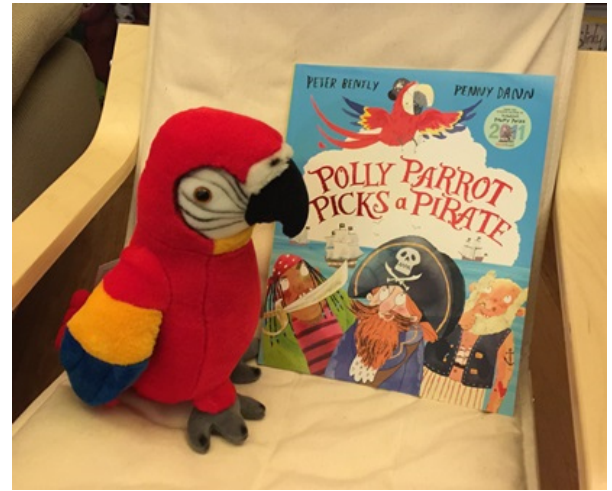
Hanging boards are commonly used to advertise businesses, but many shops, restaurants and museums in the Old Town have three-dimensional signs. Here are just a few that enliven our streets:





Poetry Library and 6VT

Members who attended our festive event at the Poetry Library on 9 December will have seen how welcoming it looks after its recent upgrade. The Brownlee Old Town Trust, helped by a donation by the Old Town Association, has bought a number of items for the children's area of the library including books, book bags and puppets.



The Trust has also bought books for the 6VT Edinburgh City Youth Café which has relocated to the Vennel between Lauriston Place and the Grassmarket. Founded 21 years ago, the 6VT Youth Café provides a safe social space for vulnerable young people in Edinburgh. The Café also supports families through the opportunity for young parents and their babies and toddlers to meet other parents and share experiences. It is for this group that a library has been provided. The books are already being used and enjoyed as you can see!



OTA Activities Winter 2016

Surgeons' Hall Museum. Thursday 28 January, 5.00 pm. A visit to the splendidly refurbished museum with an introductory talk and tour. Those attending are welcome to stay on for a talk between 6.00pm and 7.15pm by journalist and author Peter Ranscombe who will discuss his debut novel, a historical thriller called Hare, which takes the story of Burke and Hare and asks what happened next to Hare after Burke was hanged. You may then continue to browse the collection until the museum closes at 8.00pm. Tickets £5, all welcome.

Fire, Filth & Food. Thursday 18 February. Quaker Meeting House, Victoria Terrace, 7.00 pm. John Lowrey, Senior Lecturer in architectural history at the Edinburgh College of Art explains how in 17th century Edinburgh, development was shaped by very pragmatic concerns of urban hygiene, food supply and markets, and the ever-present fear of fire. Tickets £3, all welcome.

AGM and the Deep-Fried Mars Bar. Wednesday 16 March. Quaker Meeting House, Victoria Terrace, 7.00 pm. Members' chance to quiz the Association's committee about what they have been doing over the last year. The meeting will be preceded by a talk by food researcher Dr Christine Knight of the University of Edinburgh on the deep-fried Mars Bar. It has become a notorious emblem for Scotland's diet – and for many, a national embarrassment. But why does a deep-fried chocolate bar provoke such strong reactions, whether disgust, disbelief, or laughter? No cost, but please let us know if you want to come so we know how many chairs to set out.

Call for Nominations. 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 (and our website). 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 or a copy of the Association's constitution.

Incorporated Trades of Edinburgh. Monday 11 April, 6.30pm. 61 Melville Street. Come to see the headquarters of the Incorporated Trades of Edinburgh and take a tour, led by the society's historian, of the large collection of artefacts which illustrate the long history of the Fourteen Trades of Edinburgh. Tickets £3, all welcome.

Apply for tickets using the enclosed ticket form

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

Other events and happenings

Both the **National Library of Scotland** and **Edinburgh Central Library** are running their usual varied (and free) series of events. Details at www.nls.uk/events and www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/edinburgh-reads-1650684470 respectively.

The current exhibition at the **City Arts Centre** in Market Street is William Gear (1915 - 1997): the painter that Britain forgot. This runs until 14 February.

In the **Museum of Edinburgh** on the Canongate, starting on 6 February and running until 26 June, will be an exhibition by artist Adele Gregory entitled Paths, Parks and Pencil: exploring Edinburgh's Hidden Wooded Spaces.

On 24 January the **Museum of Scotland** in Chambers Street invites you to release your inner bard with a day of Burns-themed fun for all ages including live music in the Grand Gallery from 1.30pm.