



# Edinburgh Old Town Association Newsletter

April 2017

## Former Royal High School

We last covered this subject in the April 2016 Newsletter. To recap, at that point the City Council Planning Committee had rejected – by a narrow margin – the application to turn the former Royal High School buildings on Calton Hill into a luxury hotel. This would have involved the building of two large new blocks either side of Thomas Hamilton’s splendid neoclassical building. The developers behind the application appealed against that decision. The appeal was to be considered by the Scottish Government’s Planning and Environmental Appeals Division, a process which was anticipated to take “some months”. Meanwhile, the Royal High School Preservation Trust submitted proposals to convert the buildings into three new public performance spaces and a new home for St. Mary’s Music School. They had detailed plans and their proposal was fully funded. The Trust had said it would hold open its proposal until the process of considering the hotel was complete. Now read on ...

The Music School proposal was granted planning permission in August 2016. But in December Duddingston House Properties, the developers behind the original hotel proposal, put on hold their appeal against the refusal of that proposal and submitted in a new planning application – still to develop the site as a luxury hotel. This reduces the size of the new blocks but even in the developers’ own artist’s impressions (example below) they still dominate Hamilton’s building. The existence of this new application means that the music school proposal cannot go ahead. This is because in 2010 the council signed a contract with the hotel developers, after Duddingston won an open competition to transform the site. Duddingston argue the contract gives them until 2022 to come up with a viable plan. In other words, they can block any other use of the site for the next five years. The Old Town Association has objected to this second hotel scheme.



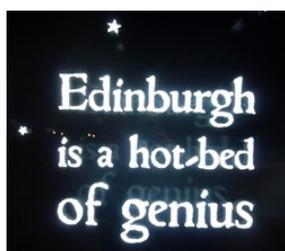
## Council Elections: a reminder

As mentioned in the last Newsletter, elections to the City of Edinburgh Council take place on 4 May 2017. We all moan about the Council from time to time – often with good cause – but it delivers services which are important to all of us and those who take the trouble to vote perhaps have a better right to criticise than those who don't. It would be good if the turnout in our ward at these elections was better than the woeful 36.6% at the elections in 2012.

Remember that the single transferable voting system means every vote counts, so make sure you express your views through the ballot box!

## Stars and Stories

An interesting innovation by Edinburgh City of Literature over the winter was Canongate Stars and Stories, an illuminated walking trail with twenty light boxes displaying quotations shining a light on the print and publishing history of the Canongate area. A downloadable guide to the trail can be found at [www.cityofliterature.com/words-on-the-street/complete-guide-canongate-stars-stories/](http://www.cityofliterature.com/words-on-the-street/complete-guide-canongate-stars-stories/).



The trail is scheduled to finish at the end of March. If you don't manage to see it there is a selection of the quotations below.



Can you identify the sources of the quotations?

Answers at foot of opposite page.

## Sibbald's Walk

And here's another poser. Can you say where Sibbald's Walk is in the Old Town? And do you know who it is named after? The answer to the first question is that it is an open space created as part of the New Waverley development. It can be accessed from a new (and rather large) pend on the Canongate or from Market Street. It has good views of Calton Hill. The second question is answered by an information panel in the new space which explains that Robert Sibbald, born in Edinburgh in 1641, was a physician and antiquarian who became the first Professor of Medicine at the University of Edinburgh. There his first project was to create a physic garden to rival the King's Garden in Paris where he had studied botany in 1661. This was established near the Palace of Holyrood House and was the ancestor of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. After a few years the garden expanded to a second site now lost under Waverley Station; then in 1763 moved to a site off Leith Walk and finally to the present site in 1820. So the new Sibbald's Walk is roughly midway between the two early physic garden sites so it is quite possible that Sibbald walked near here in passing between them.

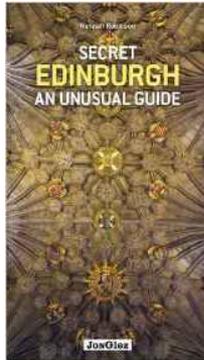
## Cowgate Under-5s' Centre

Our Convener's Review of 2016 mentions that this is one of the local organisations with which the Association continues to have links. Recently, through the Brownlee Trust, we were able to buy the Centre three classic texts about traditional children's games: *The Singing Street* and *The Golden City* by James Ritchie and *The Lore & Language of Schoolchildren* by Iona & Peter Opie. The books are to support an initiative they have to pilot some play and street games in Old Town closes and courtyards with the children. The three Brownlee trustees who delivered the books on a sunny morning in March were impressed by the work the Centre is doing and the children's obvious enjoyment of the activities and facilities provided.

*Opposite, Lynn McNair, Head of the Cowgate Under 5's Centre, with the donated books*

## Like Buses...

You wait ages for an interesting quirky guide to Edinburgh and then two come along at once. In the last Newsletter we reviewed *111 Places in Edinburgh That You Shouldn't Miss* by Old Town resident Gillian Tait. *Secret Edinburgh – An Unusual Guide* by Hannah Robinson is in some ways similar but is if anything even more packed with out-of-the-way and interesting facts. It fully lives up to its billing as an alternative to tourist traps and crowded landmarks and “an indispensable guide for those who thought they knew Edinburgh well”. The author is an Edinburgh-born writer and film-maker who spent two years researching the book. She has been quoted as saying “You don’t really know your own city as well as you think you do. I think you only really explore somewhere properly when you go there on holiday and buy a guide book.” How true! Old Town entries include Andy Goldsworthy’s “Hutton Roof” at the Museum of Scotland, the roof of St Giles and Alison Watt’s painting *Still* in Old St Paul’s, a church which Hannah Robinson rightly describes as “a bit of a hidden gem”.



## St Cecilia's Hall unwrapped



St Cecilia's Hall, first opened in 1763, reopens this spring after years under wraps undergoing a major refurbishment. The £6.5m restoration and renovation has brought the University's collection of early stringed, brass, woodwind and percussion instruments from the Reid Concert Hall to join the Russell Collection of early keyboard instruments, making St Cecilia's a key destination for musical instrument display, teaching and performance.

### *Stars and Stories: the answers*

A city is a drama in time. Patrick Geddes, renowned for his innovative ideas on social reform, environmentalism, and town planning.

Edinburgh is a hot-bed of genius. Tobias Smollett, author and translator of the Scottish Enlightenment, who lodged with his sister at St John's Pend. This quotation is taken from *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*, a novel presented in the form of letters, which follows Mathew Bramble, his family, and his servants as they travel through England and Scotland.

Bright is the ring of words. Robert Louis Stevenson, this line is from his poem *Bright is the Ring*, one of his *Songs of Travel*.

Ill-fated genius! This line begins Robert Burns' 1787 poem *On Fergusson* about Robert Fergusson, the Edinburgh-born poet who died tragically young and whose statue is outside the Canongate Kirk.

## Off the Wall

The Studio 24 building in Calton Road was originally built as an engineering factory for the railway, then used as The Earl of Haig Poppy factory, a TV studio for Granada television, a cinema, and latterly a night club for over 30 years. We were surprised when it was suddenly transformed by a mural:

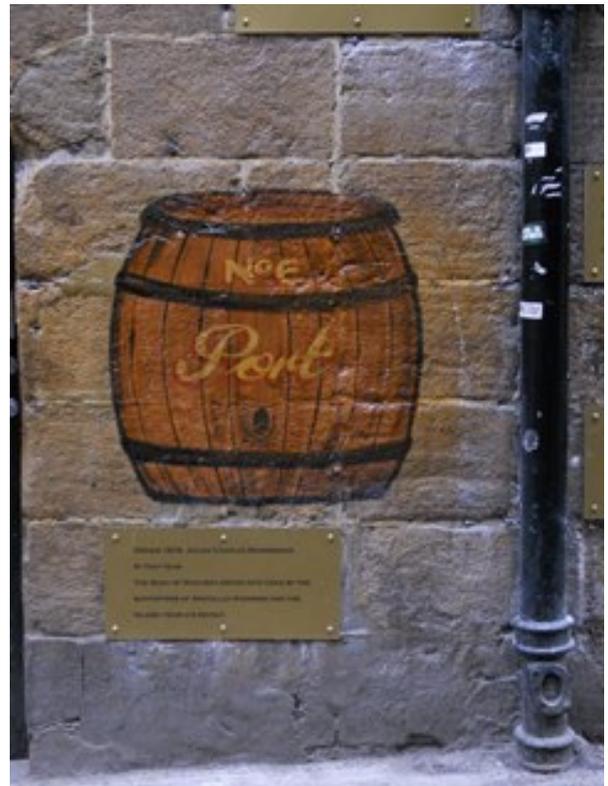


... especially as no planning permission had been sought. It turns out that the mural was the result of a grant from the New Waverley Fund. A bit of joined-up thinking required!

Studio 24 is not the only colourful mural in the Old Town. Candlemaker Row is enlivened by these cheerful flowers:



A more commercial example of a painted wall is at the foot of Niddry Street:



... the “Port” not being one of the historic entrances into Edinburgh, but one of the beverages on offer! Other barrels advertise other beverages available in this establishment.

## Events and happenings

There are two exhibitions worth seeing at the **Dovecot Gallery** in Infirmary Street: *The Weaver's Apprentice* (until 1 July) looks at the master-apprentice succession at the studio since 1912. *Built-In Tapestry* (from 26 May) has examples of tapestries commissioned for specific architectural spaces.

The current exhibition at **The Queen's Gallery** at the Palace of Holyroodhouse is called *Maria Merian's Butterflies* (until 23 July). Maria Sibylla Merian was a German artist and entomologist who in 1699 set sail with her youngest daughter for Suriname in South America. There she spent two years studying the animals and plants she encountered, leading to the publication of the lavishly illustrated *Metamorphosis of the Insects of Suriname*, which brought the wonders of Suriname to Europe. The exhibition tells the artist's story through her works. After *Maria Merian's Butterflies* the following exhibition is *Shadows of War* (starts 4 August) which focuses on Roger Fenton's pioneering photographs of the Crimean War, taken in 1855.

The next major exhibition at the **National Museum of Scotland** will tell the story of *Bonnie Prince Charlie and the rise and fall of the Jacobites* (Friday 23 June to Sunday 12 November).

*Paper Trail: Drawings, Watercolours, Prints* at the **City Arts Centre** in Market Street runs until 21 May. For talks and events at the **National Library of Scotland** see [www.nls.uk/events](http://www.nls.uk/events) and [www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/Edinburgh-reads-1650684470](http://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/Edinburgh-reads-1650684470) for talks and events at **Edinburgh Central Library**.

**Gas Main Replacement.** From March until October SGN (formerly Scottish Gas Networks) will be replacing gas mains in the High Street, Blackfriars Street, Cowgate, Holyrood Road and St John Street. The work is essential to replace the existing 120-year-old metal gas pipes with modern plastic pipes. The work will be carried out in phases as outlined in the map below. Archaeologists will be on hand throughout to ensure any historic features and artefacts are recorded. Details of the closures and diversions are in a 12-page leaflet available from the SGN website: <https://www.sgn.co.uk/uploadedFiles/Marketing/Pages/Publications/Docs-Roadworks-Leaflets/SGN-Customer-Leaflet-Old-Town-Edinburgh-March-2017-170314.pdf>.



## OTA Activities

**Burke and Hare: Dissected.** Wednesday 19 April, 7.00 p.m., Quaker Meeting House. In 1828, William Burke and William Hare embarked on a murder spree that was to shock the civilised world to its core. In this talk by John Baxter discover how the actions of Burke and Hare impacted on British medical history. John Baxter is one of Scotland's leading historians on the Burke and Hare murders who has spoken extensively on the subject and has been enlisted as a consultant for TV, film and stage. Tickets £5, members & friends welcome.

**Technology of Fashion.** Thursday 27 April, 2.30 pm; Saturday 29 April, 2.30 pm; Wednesday 10 May, 2.30 pm or Saturday 13 May 11.30 am. Come on a one-hour tour of the Fashion & Style gallery and learn how technology has influenced the clothes we wear. Led by OTA committee member and NMS volunteer guide, Rosemary Mann. Tickets £5 (includes a donation to the National Museums of Scotland). Members and friends welcome. Please indicate on the ticket form which tour you wish to take.

**St Cecilia's Hall.** Tuesday 23 May, 6.00 p.m. Ruthanne Baxter of the Edinburgh University Museums team will lead us on a tour of the newly restored St. Cecilia's Hall and show us the instruments as well as the new concert hall. Tickets £5, members & friends welcome

**NMS Stores in Granton.** Tuesday 13 June 2.00 p.m. Take a tour behind the scenes at the stores of the National Museums of Scotland in Granton. This will be led by NMS Assistant Curator of Natural Sciences Ashleigh Whiffin, who will introduce her own favourites: beetles! Tickets £5. Numbers are limited so this event is for **members only**.

**The Royal Scottish Museum in 1938 and Members' Meeting.** Thursday 29 June, 7.00 p.m., Augustine United Church, George IV Bridge. Geoff Swinney, Honorary Research Associate of National Museums Scotland, will show the silent film, *The Royal Scottish Museum*, with his own commentary. Directed by Alan Harper, it shows the Museum in 1938. The camera travels through the public areas and behind-the-scenes, giving a unique record of the work of the Museum. The evening will conclude with a Members' Meeting where you can quiz the committee about ongoing issues. Tickets £5, members & friends welcome

### **When we say members only, we mean it!**

Please do not ask for tickets for others for these events unless the others are also members.

## **How to Book Tickets**

The Old Town Association now has an account with Eventbrite and PayPal so you may book and pay for tickets on-line instead of by post. Your options are:

- **Apply by post** as before using the enclosed ticket form. Please remember to send a stamped addressed envelope for your tickets!
- **On-line.** The OTA has a PayPal account. Send an email to [info@eota.org.uk](mailto:info@eota.org.uk) to book the tickets you require. Once you get confirmation that the event has not sold out, pay on-line using PayPal (a personal PayPal account is not necessary). Click the Donate button link at [www.eota.org.uk/index.php/what-we-do/join-us](http://www.eota.org.uk/index.php/what-we-do/join-us). You may also use the Donate button to pay your subscription (you will have been sent a reminder if it is due!), but do remember to include a message with your payment or send us an email (also to [info@eota.org.uk](mailto:info@eota.org.uk)) so we know what your payment is for!
- **Eventbrite.** Book and pay for tickets using Eventbrite. The OTA page on Eventbrite is at <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/edinburgh-old-town-association-12448508825>. You will be sent an e-ticket but there is no need to print this out. A surcharge applies which covers the Eventbrite fees so you pay more if you book through Eventbrite.