



Edinburgh Old Town Association Newsletter

September 2017

A Question of Balance

The Old Town has been welcoming visitors since at least the eighteenth century. Those of us who live in or know the area can derive great pleasure from sharing it with appreciative tourists. The festivals bring an amazing range of performers to the city. One-off events like the filming of the “Avengers” earlier this year (the subject of the photo-essay in the Newsletter) are interesting – and also, presumably, are a useful source of revenue for the City Council.

But sometimes we can feel swamped by the sheer numbers of visitors on the pavements; coaches and tour buses clogging the streets; “tartan tat” filling the shops, and so on. And sometimes it seems that those responsible for promoting the City take a simplistic and narrowly-focused view that more is necessarily good when it comes to all aspects of tourism. A depressing example was the comments reportedly made in April by Roddy Smith, chief executive of Essential Edinburgh, that the city should embrace boozy hen and stag dos. There are plenty of people in the Old Town who will have seen just how much disruption and unpleasantness badly behaved hen and stag parties cause and will be highly doubtful of claims that they bring balancing economic benefit.

Dublin recognised as long ago as 1998 that there were problems with such parties and banned large hen and stag groups from the city centre as well as bringing in a number of measures to empower bar staff to refuse to serve customers who look like they have had enough. In 2009 Barcelona banned 2-for-1 drinks offers, ladies’ nights, and other promotions that encourage punters to drink more for less. The move was in part aimed at ridding the streets of drunken tourists on stag and hen weekends. Premises can face fines of up to €6,000 (£5,500) for infringements and repeat offenders could be forced to close down. Should we not be considering similar moves here?

It has been encouraging to see in recent months what is hopefully the start of a more nuanced and intelligent discussion of the benefits and drawbacks of tourism to the City as a whole and the Old Town in particular. Lothian MSP Andy Wightman has called for council powers to limit short-term rentals in Edinburgh to reduce anti-social behaviour, loss of community and housing displacement. Adam Wilkinson, director of Edinburgh World Heritage, has spoken of the need to achieve the right balance between heritage, residents, business and visitors and to learn from experience in other historic cities (many of which are taking steps, among other things, to limit the impact of short-term rentals). Fergus Linehan, director of the Edinburgh International Festival, warns of the risk of ugly new buildings jeopardising the city’s reputation as an exquisite setting for the arts.

Others, including Alexander McCall Smith, have expressed reservations about some of the development happening and in prospect around the city. Even Marketing Edinburgh has reportedly accepted the need for “careful management to ensure that critical balance between tourism, residents and local business remains in harmony”. Many of us would question whether we are currently in a state of harmony but at least the recognition that there is a critical balance to be achieved is welcome.

A concrete step towards achieving that balance in one specific area may result from Police Scotland's stated determination to crack down on nuisance buskers. Those who perform after 9.00pm or use amplification at unacceptable levels face warnings, £40 fines and potentially confiscation of their equipment. Let's hope these good intentions lead to real improvements.

Women in War

Just over a hundred years ago The Scotsman of 30 November 1917 reported the funeral in St Giles of Dr Elsie Inglis: “the occasion of an impressive public tribute to her beneficent work in connection with the war ... A large number of those attending were women ... Military Uniforms and the grey uniforms of the Scottish Women's Hospitals diversified the conventional colours of mourning ... Conspicuous in the chancel were the tall figures, in light brown military costume, of the Serbian representatives”.

Elsie Maude Inglis was born in 1864 in India, but in 1878 moved with her family to Edinburgh. She went on to study medicine, initially at the then revolutionary Edinburgh School of Medicine for Women under Dr Sophia Jex-Blake, and qualified as a doctor in 1892. She was appointed to a post at what would later become the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital for Women in London but in 1894 returned to Edinburgh where she established a medical practice with a fellow female physician. In 1904 she set up a small maternity hospital for Edinburgh's poor in the High Street, staffed entirely by women. This later became the Elsie Maude Inglis Memorial Hospital.

At the outbreak of war in 1914, Inglis suggested the creation of medical units staffed by women. Despite opposition from the War Office and rejection by both the Red Cross and the Royal Army Medical Corps (one of whose officers reportedly said “My good lady, go home and sit still”), she founded the Scottish Women's Hospitals Committee.

In early 1915 Inglis accompanied a women's medical unit to Serbia. She was taken captive by Austrian forces, but was later released and returned to Britain in 1916. She went to Russia later in 1916, and began medical work in support of Serbian troops there. Inglis continued to work in Russia during 1917, but was becoming increasingly ill herself. She was forced to return to Britain and died of cancer on 26 November 1917, a day after her ship arrived in Newcastle Upon Tyne.

In all, the Scottish Women's Hospitals Committee sent over 1000 women doctors, nurses, orderlies and drivers to war zones across Europe. They oversaw the creation of four Scottish Women's Hospitals, which had much lower levels of death from disease than the more traditional military hospitals. They also sent fourteen medical units to serve in areas as diverse as France, Serbia, Corsica, Salonika, Romania, Russia and Malta.

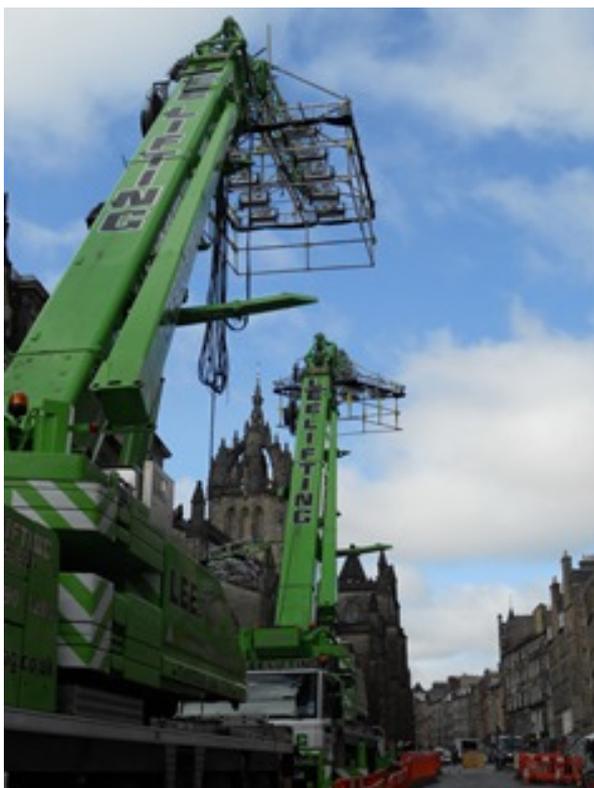
This was just a part of women's contribution to the war effort. On 28 September 1917 The Scotsman reported a government minister



Photo: Antonia Reeve from Scotland's Shrine: the Scottish National War Memorial.

saying that “all over the United Kingdom women were to be found doing work that physically it was believed impossible that they could do before the war ... There were prejudices to be overcome ... Those, however, who had seen the women, as he had seen them, working in our great munition factories, moving immense shells and doing work of the most skilled and laborious kind with the same ease and accuracy as ever it was done by highly-trained men before; those who had seen women working in our fields and farmyards, who have seen them in our counting houses and banks, knew their capacity”.

Some of the prejudice mentioned by the Minister had emerged in The Scotsman’s letter columns a couple of months earlier. A lively exchange was initiated by a letter from someone signing himself “Driver” who suggested that a pay-rise being sought by workers on the Edinburgh trams should only be applied to men on the grounds that most of the female conductors had not been in paid employment before the war and tended to spend their wages frivolously. He was quickly slapped down not only by his female colleagues but also by several tram users who considered that the female conductors were better at the job than their male equivalents.



Bus Stops and Police Boxes

Anybody enjoying the spectacle of the filming of the “Avengers” film in the Old Town in April might have been surprised to see a bus stop opposite St Giles:



Even more surprising were the bus routes listed on the stop:



Although the No 1 used to travel the length of the Royal Mile, the Nos 4, 14, 15 and 16 have never done so. Some pedant will no doubt point this out when the film is released.

Regulars will also have been surprised to see two new police boxes appearing outside the former Midlothian County offices and the former Sheriff Court. Even more surprising is that these police boxes were super-sized, having three bays on the long side and two on the gable end, though in other details just like Edinburgh's distinctive police boxes:



The original, genuine, police boxes are two bays by one, as this one at the top of Cranston Street shows:



Whereas other cities are content with the Tardis type of police box, Edinburgh police boxes were designed in 1931 by the City Architect, Ebenezer MacRae, in an appropriately classical style with pilasters, broken pediments and garlands. Many have found new uses, such as these ticket booths in the High Street and Lawnmarket:



By Leaves We Live

As part of the newly restored Riddle's Court, a series of carved sandstone roundels will be placed to form a trail leading from the Lawnmarket into the interior courtyard. This project involved design input from Class P4/5 at Ballater School, sculptor Mary Bourne and three masons from Historic Environment Scotland. In addition, each threshold that visitors cross has been carved with a Geddes motto.



Above: HES Mason Gregor Alcorn at work

Below: The finished roundels at the HES conservation workshop at Elgin Cathedral



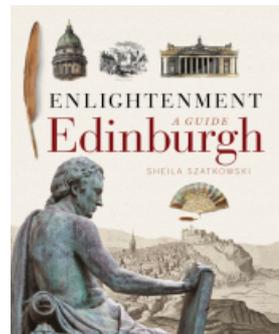
Photos: Scottish Historic Buildings Trust

Mary Bourne was the sculptor of the 'Carpet of Leaves' outside the Scottish Poetry Library removed when the library was extended. These Caithness slabs have been re-sited to the exterior courtyard of Riddle's Court.

The designs on the roundels depict botanical motifs and are inspired by the work of Patrick Geddes' in Scotland, France, Palestine and India. The Patrick Geddes Centre at Riddle's Court opens in August 2017.

Enlightenment Edinburgh

In our previous two newsletters we reviewed two guidebooks to Edinburgh, each with a twist of being of hidden or unusual places. Now we have another review, this time of a guide to Edinburgh at the time of the Enlightenment by Sheila Szatkowski, writer and historian and an expert on the engraver and caricaturist John Kay. This book takes us to places in the Old Town, New Town and Southside; places that, unlike those in the books reviewed earlier, are well known. Sheila's twist is to give us these places in the context of the Edinburgh Enlightenment, and how the physical and social structure of the medieval Manhattan that was the Old Town fostered the intellectual ferment of the late 18th and early 19th centuries.



The sobriquet of Edinburgh as the Modern Athens was adopted in the time of Hume, Smith and Black, before the New Town was built and long before Calton Hill was adorned with the buildings that now give Edinburgh the name of Athens of the North. Sheila gives us snippets and gems found in little known corners and obscure original publications. There is information about not just the well-known Enlightenment figures but the lesser known such as scientist David Brewster and political martyr Thomas Muir.

This lavishly illustrated book is one to relish for its humour and erudition and then to place at the bedside of visitors.

Election Results

When our last Newsletter went out in April we knew that Council elections were to take place on 4 May. We didn't know that there was to be a General Election on 8 June!

For Council purposes the Old Town falls within the City Centre Ward which now has four councillors (before the May election there were three). The three previously sitting Councillors were re-elected in May along with Clair Miller (Scottish Green Party). The turnout was 43.7%, up from 36.6% at the previous election in 2012 (a welcome show of increased engagement in local politics). For the Westminster Parliament the Old Town falls within the Edinburgh East constituency for which Tommy Sheppard was re-elected MP. Turnout was 66% (down 5.11% on 2015, showing disengagement from Westminster politics).

The contact details for those elected in the 2017 elections are given opposite.

Councillors

Postal addresses The City of Edinburgh Council, City Chambers, High Street, Edinburgh EH1 1YJ.

Karen Doran Scottish Labour Party. Telephone 0131 529 3265. Email karen.doran@edinburgh.gov.uk.

Claire Millar Scottish Green Party. Telephone 0131 529 4396. Email claire.hi.miller@edinburgh.gov.uk. Twitter @clairehimiller.

Jo Mowat Scottish Conservative and Unionist. Telephone 0131 529 4077. Email joanna.mowat@edinburgh.gov.uk. Twitter @jomowat

Alasdair Rankin Scottish National Party. Telephone 0131 529 3243. Email alasdair.rankin@edinburgh.gov.uk.

Member of Parliament

Parliamentary address House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. Telephone 020 7219 6653. Constituency office 94 Portobello High Street, Edinburgh EH15 1AN. Telephone 01316 618023. Email tommy.sheppard.mp@parliament.uk. Twitter @tommysheppard.

The scaffolding masking the Mitre Bar, the Royal Mile Tavern and Ladbrokes is not for a roof repair that is taking a long time, but for the building of a block of flats that will fill the aerial gap site above. The design echoes that of the tenement that used to occupy the site, pulled down in c1970 when the roof structure failed. This was in the days before statutory notices; will the same start to happen again now that the Council has abrogated responsibility for ensuring that the fabric of common property is maintained?



Events and happenings

The current exhibition at **The Queen's Gallery** at the Palace of Holyroodhouse is called *Shadows of War: Roger Fenton's Photographs of the Crimea, 1855*. It runs until 26 November 2017. This is the first exhibition to focus exclusively on Fenton's pioneering photographs of the Crimean War.

The current major exhibition at the **National Museum of Scotland**, running until 12 November, tells the story of *Bonnie Prince Charlie and the rise and fall of the Jacobites*. More than 300 spectacular objects including paintings, costumes, jewellery, documents, weapons and glassware will bring to life the events of this turbulent period in European history from the deposition of James VII in 1688 to Culloden in 1746 and its aftermath.

Also currently on display at the National Museum is some of the material from the Galloway Hoard – an unparalleled find of Viking-age gold, silver and jewelled treasures which has been described as the richest collection of rare and unique Viking-age objects ever found in Britain or Ireland. There is no charge for viewing the hoard although donations are welcome towards the £1.98 million which the museum has to raise by 12 November if the hoard is to be saved for the nation.

A fascinating (and free) exhibition at the **City Arts Centre** in Market Street, running until 8 October, is called *An Edinburgh Alphabet, an A-Z of the City's Collections*. It features more than 300 objects, selected by the curators and assembled together for the first time.

On at the **National Library of Scotland** until 12 November is an exhibition called *Enduring Eye* which showcases Frank Hurley's extraordinary photographs and films of Sir Ernest Shackleton's Antarctic expedition of 1914-1917. For other talks and events at the National Library see www.nls.uk/events.

The current exhibition at the **Dovecot Studio** is *Daughters of Penelope* running until 20 January 2018. The exhibition features key women weavers and artists who have contributed to Dovecot's history and present.

The Old Edinburgh Club is Edinburgh's local history society and runs a winter programme of talks. Meetings take place at 7pm at the Augustine United Church, 41 George IV Bridge, Edinburgh, EH1 1EL and are open to non-members on payment of a small fee (currently £5.00).

Wednesday 11 October: Ian Robertson & Gordon Rutter, *The Death and Life of the Great Lafayette*.

Wednesday 15 November: Alex Hale, *Marks, Meanings & Messages: an Archaeology of Hidden Voices*.

Wednesday 17th January 2018: Professor Richard Rodger, *Mapping Edinburgh's Social History*.

Wednesday 14th February: Dr Lance Whitehead & Dr Jenny Nex, *The Trafficking of Musical Instruments in Georgian and Victorian Edinburgh*.

Wednesday 14th March: Ann Glen, *The Waverley Route: Death and Revival*.

For talks and events at the **Edinburgh Central Library** see www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/Edinburgh-reads-1650684470.

The annual **Edinburgh Doors Open Day** weekend, organised by the Cockburn Society, is a chance to explore some of Edinburgh's architecturally and culturally significant buildings - all for free. This year's events take place on Saturday 23 and Sunday 24 September with a series of talks during the week beginning 18 September. Further details were not available as we went to press.

OTA Activities

Riddle's Court. Tuesday 26 September, 6.30 p.m. Tour of this 16th Century courtyard house which has been a merchant's house, a venue for a banquet held by King James VI, aristocratic apartments, overcrowded tenements, a Mechanics Subscription Library, a University Hall developed by Patrick Geddes, emergency post-war housing, a Community Learning Centre, and an Edinburgh Fringe Festival venue. Tickets £6 (includes refreshments), members & friends welcome.

Victorian Edinburgh Walk. Monday 23 October, 7.00 pm. With the exodus of the middle classes to the New Town and other suburbs, the fabric of the Old Town rotted while the population boomed. Robert Howie of Historic Edinburgh Tours will lead us on a two-hour walk from Greyfriars to the Cowgate Port to see the reminders of this period of over-crowding, poor sanitation and chronic ill-health. The tour will involve steps and standing around. Tickets £6, **members only**.

The Joy of Spines. Wednesday 29 November, 6.00 p.m., National Library of Scotland. Talk by Graeme Hawley, Modern Collections Manager, on what it is like working with a collection of over 24 million books, manuscripts, maps and other material. This is a free public event with a number of seats booked for OTA members, **booking essential**.

Edinburgh on Film and Christmas Party. Thursday 14 December, 7.00 p.m., Augustine United Church, George IV Bridge. Rosie Ellison of Edinburgh Film will explain how our city has been, and is now increasingly, used as a location for many films and TV dramas. Come along to enjoy the talk and film clips, and to partake of our usual high class wine and nibbles afterwards! Tickets £6, 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.

New Address for Tickets

Roma Crampin has retired as our long-serving membership and tickets secretary. We shall miss her cheerful efficiency and wish her every success with her move to Glasgow to be nearer her daughter and grandchildren. Our new membership and tickets secretary is Laura Harrington. Laura's address is: 8 Abbeyhill Crescent, Edinburgh EH8 8DZ.

How to Book Tickets

The Old Town Association has accounts 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. The new address for ticket applications and subscriptions is: 8 Abbeyhill Crescent, Edinburgh EH8 8DZ. Please remember to send a stamped addressed envelope for your tickets!
- **On-line.** Book tickets using Eventbrite (<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/edinburgh-old-town-association-12448508825>). To save you transaction fees, OTA events are shown on Eventbrite as free; you will need to pay for the ticket where applicable. You will be sent an e-ticket but there is no need to print this 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.

You may also use PayPal 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) so we know what your payment is for!