



# Edinburgh Old Town Association Newsletter

January 2019

*A Happy New Year  
to all our readers!*

It has almost become a seasonal tradition for this newsletter to bemoan the generally poor quality of Christmas lights in the Old Town. Things were no better this season but this time we are going to resist the urge to go into full Scrooge mode. However, this edition's photo essay does look at the startling contrasts in Christmas trees around our area. Otherwise, this Newsletter is mainly concerned with travel and transport around the Old Town.

## **Transport in the Old Town**

Barbara Logue, the Old Town Association's Convener, reflects on this issue in the light of proposals from the City Council, about which she attended a workshop towards the end of 2018:

The Old Town Association has in the past highlighted the problems caused by transportation issues in our area. In our newsletter of April 2018 there was a comprehensive article that illustrated the difficulties caused by the multitude of city tour buses, the huge tour coaches serving local hotels trying to manoeuvre in our busy streets, the size of delivery vehicles, the unrestricted light (and heavy) goods vehicles that damage roads, kerbs and air quality, and the number of large refuse lorries operated by multiple private contractors that duplicate the same collection runs. These incidents occur in a World Heritage site and impact on the quality of life of residents in particular, people who work in the Old Town and also visitors to the city. Walking in the city centre has become more and more dangerous and unpleasant. Unfortunately, many of these issues are still unresolved.

The City of Edinburgh Council has recently produced plans to address some of these issues. In its Open Streets programme the Council wishes to develop a policy of vehicle-free days on the first Sunday of each month (10am-5pm) in parts of the city centre (and in other areas of Edinburgh described as town centres e.g. Bruntsfield/ Morningside and Gorgie/Dalry). The plan is that "through the temporary closure of selected streets the programme will allow the city centre and town centres to be experienced as quieter, more people-focussed places, where the city's heritage, shops, cafes, restaurants and cultural attractions can be enjoyed by all without the impact of traffic congestion and air pollution". These temporary closures "will help shape longer-term plans for transforming the city centre and town centres to prioritise access on foot, by bike and public transport".

However, a potential serious problem in the city centre and, in particular, the Old Town with its inclines is the effect that the 'vehicle-free' Sunday might have on those who have mobility issues. Does vehicle-free mean no traffic at all or will public transport still be available? What about blue badge holders?

The idea of a vehicle-free day is not unique to Edinburgh. In central Paris traffic is limited on one Sunday a month and the proposal by the mayor of Paris is to ban traffic from the centre permanently to be replaced by less polluting electric shuttles.

The City of Edinburgh Council has produced a far-reaching document for consultation called: *EDINBURGH – Connecting Our City, Transforming Our Places*. With this document the Council is “setting out bold ambitious ideas that will help achieve its Edinburgh 2050 vision; a fairer, thriving, connected and inspired city”. What it is hoped will be achieved is “an exceptional city centre that is for all, a place for people to live, work, visit and play. A place that is for the future, enriched by the legacy of the past”. This is an extensive programme covering the whole of Edinburgh but many of the ideas on transport will impact on the Old Town.

There was discussion of the 15 proposals outlined by the Council at four workshops, one of which I attended. The proposals were drafted under three headlines.

### **A Fair and Inspiring Capital City**

1. Creating a walkable city centre and reducing the dominance of vehicular traffic.
2. Improving our streets, gardens, spaces and places.
3. Strengthening our town centres e.g. Bruntsfield/Morningside, Portobello, Gorgie/Dalry
4. Creating better accessibility by introducing better ways of physically connecting modes of transport - rail, bus, tram, bike hire and taxi. Improving access to bus and train stations, in particular to Waverley Station.
5. Making it easier to use public transport with an integrated payment system like the Oyster card in London.
6. Making individual journeys easier with the use of Car Clubs, lift-sharing and e-bikes. The benefits would be access, equality, inclusion, affordability, flexibility and choice.

### **A Healthy City and Environment**

- 7 Creating a more active city by introducing strategic walking and cycling routes. Networks would link residential and employment areas, connect with city centre routes and link with Park and Ride sites.
- 8 Improving air quality. The Scottish Government and the CEC are committed to the introduction of a Low Emission Zone (LEZ) in Edinburgh by 2020. Work is underway in Edinburgh to determine which vehicles will be restricted.
- 9 Encouraging the use of clean vehicles and the introduction of more electric cars.
- 10 Giving people in new developments in the city healthier transport options.

### **A Smart and Thriving City**

- 11 Widening the reach of public transport. Extending the tram network to serve key destinations like the Royal Infirmary and Granton. Realigning the overall bus network so that bus and tram services are coordinated.
- 12 Offering more sustainable choices for longer journeys. Introducing more Park and Ride sites.
- 13 Protecting the city's environment while supporting businesses. Rationalisation of freight could reduce congestion and pollution in Edinburgh. Hubs could be established on the outskirts of the city where goods could be collected and delivered in smaller vehicles to city centre shops and businesses. Access controls based on vehicle weight, type, size emissions and time of day could facilitate the removal of large vehicles from the city centre.
- 14 Controlling the impact of commuter parking. Introducing a workplace parking levy and more controlled parking zones.
- 15 Looking to the future with progress in technology, driverless cars, and the use of data and apps.

There will be a mixed reaction to these proposals. Some are uncontroversial like the reduction in air pollution and traffic congestion and some are contentious like the extension of the tram lines. Some will be carried out by the Council and some will be out-sourced to private agencies. It will take time, political will and a lot of finance to ensure the implementation of this programme.

Finally it was announced in the press recently that 100-seat buses will be introduced in Edinburgh in late January. There will be room for 131 passengers who will be able to alight through middle doors for the first time since 2009. It has not yet been announced on which routes the new buses will run but perhaps we will see them in the Old Town.

Barbara Logue  
Convener

## On yer bike?



Members may have noticed bicycles around the city with distinctive Just Eat branding. This is a new cycle hire scheme intended, according to the scheme's website (<https://edinburghcyclehire.com>), to encourage people to use bikes "as an alternative to public transportation for everyday journeys like commuting, getting to places or just as a fun way to experience the city" The website includes several image of happy cyclists around the Old Town. But according to one of our members the bikes are pretty heavy and probably not ideally suited for use on the setts and steep hills encountered in the Old Town. We understand that electric bikes will be available under the scheme from some time in 2019. They will probably be better suited to conditions in our area.

## Silent Discos

A contradiction in terms, you might think. In fact, bizarrely, they are yet another irritation for anyone trying to move around in the Old Town. Silent discos are a fairly new idea for extracting money from tourists and making them behave like complete idiots. Groups of gullible punters are fitted out with earphones through which disco music is played to them. A group leader (DJ?) then leads them around, encouraging them to sing and dance along to the music being pumped into their ears. Some of the groups are well managed. Others are definitely not and are a hazard to themselves, other pedestrians and passing traffic. While certain walking tours require a Street Trading Licence, silent discos, which take bookings online, avoid this regulation. They are also not covered by Public Entertainment Licences. The OTA, among others, has urged the City Council to take effective action to control this nuisance.

## Water Pipes Unearthed

The first public water supply in Edinburgh was initiated as far back as 1621, when consent was granted to run a 3-inch lead pipe from Comiston Springs to a tank on Castle Hill. Completed in 1674, this was one of the first piped supplies in the country, ultimately delivering some 615,000 litres per day to a network of wells downhill from the Castle.

In the 18th century, additional water was piped in from springs in the Liberton and Swanston areas (originally by wooden pipes, later replaced by cast iron). Recent excavations for renewal of water pipes in the George Square area unearthed some of these wooden pipes, and they were displayed at the top of Middle Meadow Walk.





Elm was a popular choice for water pipes as, unlike other woods, it does not decay when kept permanently wet. Logs were bored lengthwise and tapered at one end to fit snugly into the next length of timber. If each elm trunk was 4 meters long, it would take 2,000 elm trees to give enough pipes to run the 8 km from Swanston to Castlehill.

The cannonball in the wall of Cannonball House in Castlehill shows the level of the spring (not, as ill-informed guides often say, fired from the Castle during the Jacobite rebellion of 1745).

## Christmas Cheers ... and Boos

The quality of Christmas trees in the Old Town this year has been variable. The City Council has saved our pennies by not putting up a tree in the forecourt of the City Chambers. Fair enough, as this is a space not frequented by the public. But neither was the star on the City Chambers erected, and that brings joy to the whole city.

There are fine specimens of Christmas trees in the courtyard of the University's Old College:



and in the Hawthornden Court at the Museum of Scotland. Well done, our institutions!



At the other end of the scale, the sad thing in Parliament Square seems to be trying to hide behind a display of children's art:



The tree at the top of the Mound looks as though it has been left in its protective wrappings:



We appreciate that fixing the lights to the tree before it is erected saves having to use scaffolding, but surely they can be fitted better than this?

The sparkly artificial trees, no longer deemed suitable for George Street, have now invaded the High Street. This one also provides light for the ubiquitous umbrella-toting tour tout:



Personally, we prefer the attractive snowflakes (correctly six-pointed!) decorating the post-box in the lower High Street. How many people noticed the jingle that greeted mail dropped through the slot?



The most dramatic display, however, is probably the panorama of cranes on the site of the unlamented St James Centre:





## Edinburgh in Fiction

The University of Edinburgh offers a number of courses on English Literature. One course offered is *Edinburgh in Fiction*. The course examines the city as a site of legal, religious, economic and cultural discourse. The reading list might be of interest:

Tobias Smollett, *Humphrey Clinker* (1771)

Walter Scott, *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818)

James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824)

Robert Louis Stevenson, *Kidnapped* (1886); extract from Robert Wedderburn, *The Horrors of Slavery* (1824)

Eric Linklater, *Magnus Merriman* (1935)

Muriel Spark, *The Pride of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961)

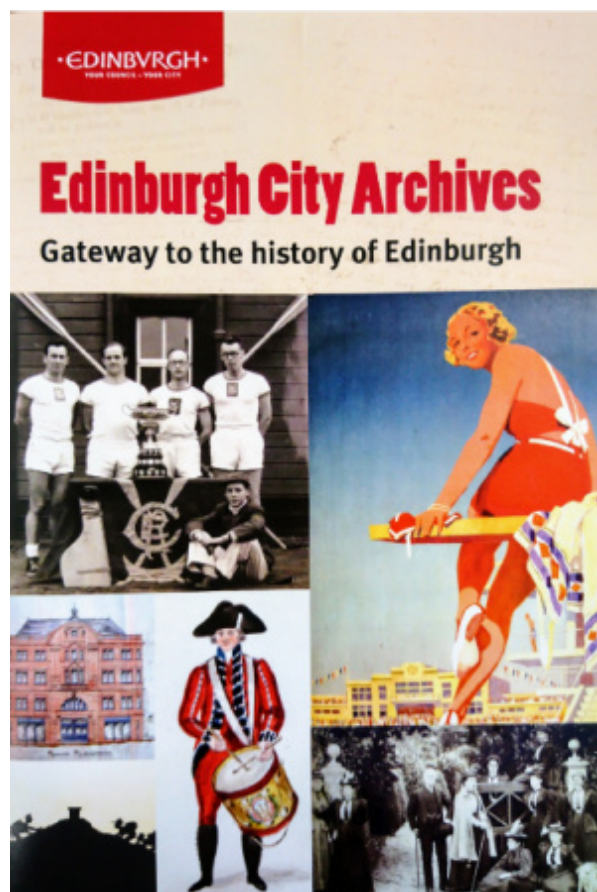
David Daiches, *Two Worlds* (1956); Muriel Spark, *Curriculum Vitae* (1962) (extracts)

Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (1993); Laura Hird, 'Routes' (1997).

Hard work – especially for those for whom English is not their native language!

## Edinburgh City Archives

Most of us are familiar with the Central Library on George IV Bridge, the National Library of Scotland across the road from it and perhaps the National Records in Register House at the north end of North Bridge. But not everyone knows that Edinburgh has its own Archives capturing the city's rich 900-year history, covering everything from kings



and monuments to toys and crime. The City Archives don't just preserve the past, they also collect records of life in the city today.

If you have an interest in the city's history you can find out more at the City Archives website [www.edinburgh.gov.uk/cityarchives](http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/cityarchives) or by emailing [archives@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:archives@edinburgh.gov.uk). You can also visit the search-room in the City Chambers; the current opening hours are Tuesday to Thursday, 9am to 1pm and 2pm to 4.30pm. We plan to look at the City Archives in more depth in a future Newsletter. Watch this space.

## Events and Happenings

Details of the lecture programme of the **Old Edinburgh Club**, Edinburgh's local history society, can be found at <http://www.ouldedinburghclub.org.uk/Lectures/>. All talks start at 7.00 pm at Augustine United Church, 41 George IV Bridge and are free to members, £5 to non-members. Upcoming talks are:

- Wednesday 16 January: *Representations of Old Edinburgh in the National Galleries of Scotland Collection*, by Dr Patricia Allerston,
- Wednesday 13 February: *The sounds of the Cross Keys: Tavern culture and the beginnings of the Edinburgh Musical Society*, by Dr Elizabeth Ford,
- Wednesday 13 March: *Women, marriage and work in 17th century Edinburgh*, by Dr Aaron Allen.

The **Costume Society Scotland** holds regular lectures in Augustine United Church, 41 George IV Bridge. The talk on Monday 1 April is *Tales of the Old Department Stores of Edinburgh* by Jane Tulloch. Lectures start at 7.30 pm (tea/coffee from 7.00 pm, charge for non-members). See <http://www.costumesocietyscotland.co.uk/whats-on/4590053735> for other lectures.

For talks and events at the **National Library of Scotland** and **Edinburgh Central Library** 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) respectively. There are currently two exhibitions at the National Library. *A Better World? Scotland after the First World War* runs until 27 April and explores the impact of the First World War on post-war Scotland. A smaller but equally interesting exhibition, running until 16 February is called *Strike for Freedom* and looks at the life of Frederick Douglass and his family. Douglass was born into slavery in 1818 in the southern US but came to Edinburgh in 1846 and established himself as Scotland's anti-slavery agent.

The current exhibition at the **Queen's Gallery** at the Palace of Holyrood House (running until 2 June 2019) is *Charles II: Art and Power*. Old master paintings and spectacular silver furniture show the rich material world of Charles II's court and the role of the arts in the re-establishment of the Stuart monarchy. Entry charges apply – but remember, your ticket gives you unlimited access to the Queen's Gallery for one year when you get it stamped after your visit.

Information about current exhibitions at the **City Arts Centre** in Market Street can be found at <https://www.edinburghmuseums.org.uk/whats-on>. Of particular interest is *Robert Blomfield: Edinburgh Street Photography* which runs until 17 March 2019. Robert Blomfield practised street photography across the UK from the 1950s to the 1970s, beginning in Edinburgh, where he studied medicine. His photographs have been described as “in turn tender, bold and humorous”. The Blomfield exhibition is nicely complemented by *In Focus: Scottish Photography*, also at the City Arts Centre and running until 12 May. This exhibition showcases the City Art Centre's photographic collections, charting the development of fine art photography in Scotland from the 19th century to the present day.

The **Museum of Edinburgh** in Huntly House has an exhibition on *100 Years of Scottish Pottery 1740-1840* (until 24 February) and **The Writers' Museum** a display of *Storyworlds: Paper Sculptures by Edinburgh Young Artists* (until 12 May).

The next major temporary exhibition at the **National Museum of Scotland** in Chambers Street, starting on 18 January and running until 5 May, is *Robots*. Featuring more than 100 objects, from early automata to science fiction film stars, this will be a chance to see the most significant collection of humanoid robots ever assembled. Entry charges apply. At the same museum running until 21 April (and free) is *Embroidered Stories: Scottish Samplers* showing 70 examples of exquisite needlework created across Scotland in the 18th and 19th centuries by young girls (and one boy). Also at the National Museum, look out for the opening on 8 February 2019 of new galleries devoted to *Egypt* and *East Asia* (China, Korea and Japan).

Last chance to see *Liberty Art Fabrics & Fashion* at **The Dovecot Studio** in Infirmery Street exhibition which runs until 12 January. From 7 February, the exhibition will be *Orla Kiely: A Life in Pattern*. Orla Kiely is celebrated for her plant-based patterns that pack a powerful graphic punch on everyday life. Entry charges apply.

## OTA Activities

**National Library of Scotland.** Monday 28 January, 2.30 p.m. Take a tour behind the scenes in the National Library, and enjoy seeing some of its treasures with Curator Ian Scott, including *Picturesque Bits of Old Edinburgh*, a book of Victorian photographs, recently restored, for which the OTA provided the funding. Tickets £5. Numbers limited, **members only**.

**Creating the Museum of Scotland.** Thursday 7 February, 2.30 p.m., Dunfermline Room, National Museum of Scotland. Ian Hooper, formerly Deputy Director of NMS and director of the project gives a talk about the history behind the Museum of Scotland project and the design and construction of the Benson & Forsyth building which opened twenty years ago in 1998. Tickets £5. Guests welcome.

**The past, present and future of the Palace of Holyroodhouse.** Wednesday 27 February, 7.30 p.m., Quaker Meeting House. 2019 is set to be a significant year in the long history of the Palace of Holyroodhouse, as a huge project to transform the visitor experience comes to completion. Discover the rich history and exciting plans for the future of this remarkable building with Learning Curator Sutherland Forsyth. Tickets £5. Guests welcome.

**Annual General Meeting and Darwin in Edinburgh.** Monday 25 March, 7.00 p.m., Quaker Meeting House. Members' chance to quiz the Association's committee about what they have been doing over the last year. Contact us at [info@eota.org.uk](mailto:info@eota.org.uk) or by post if you would like an advance copy of the annual accounts or a copy of the Association's constitution. The meeting will be followed by a talk by Rosemary Mann on the time the teenage Charles Darwin spent at the University of Edinburgh 1825-27; the talk describes the Edinburgh of the time and its impact on the young naturalist. No cost, but please let us know if you want to come so we know how many chairs to set out. Guests welcome.

*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. 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](mailto: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.

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

Please do not ask for tickets for friends or partners unless they are also members.

## How to Book Tickets

The Old Town Association uses on-line banking and 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 address for ticket applications and subscriptions is: 11/9 Dalziel Place, Edinburgh EH7 5TR. Please remember to enclose a stamped addressed envelope for your tickets!
- **On-line.** Send an email to [info@eota.org.uk](mailto:info@eota.org.uk) to say which tickets you wish to purchase. Then, pay using our bank details (shown on the ticket form) or through the OTA PayPal account (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 bank transfer or 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](mailto:info@eota.org.uk)) so we know what your payment is for!