



Edinburgh Old Town Association

Convener's Report 2011

Since the establishment of Edinburgh Old Town Association in 1976 it has been heartening that so many individuals, groups and organisations are interested in the welfare and future of Edinburgh's Old Town. It is disappointing, however, to report that despite this goodwill it appears to be becoming more of an uphill struggle to maintain and support the balance of interests which is so vital: the balance between cafés and restaurants and local shops, the balance between tat and quality shops and the balance between tourists and residents – all real issues in the Old Town. Moreover, recently two local independent shops – the Soap Company and the Bagpipe Store – have been forced to close because of large increases in Council rents and the number of cafes in the area is growing.

The issue of consultation – or, rather, lack of it – has also arisen. It would appear that the Council has decided – without consultation – to sell off its property in the Caltongate scheme complete with earlier planning consent to a new developer. Consultative meetings have been held about, among others, the Royal Mile but there have been no meaningful outcomes. In our newsletters the Old Town Association has publicised these issues and indicated the difficulties involved. As every year we continue to monitor all Old Town planning and comment where appropriate. In doing so we are always aware that the Old Town is a place for living, working and enjoyment. Any development in the Old Town must recognise its status as an historic and iconic part of Edinburgh and as part of a World Heritage Site. It is disheartening when this status seems to be ignored.

The Association has worked, as always, with other amenity and local organisations. We have co-operated with local Councillors and Lothian and Borders police and representatives attended meetings of the Old Town Community Council, the City Centre Neighbourhood Partnership, Edinburgh Civic Forum, City Centre Southern Arc Area Development Framework, the Safer Communities Forum and the Royal Mile Charrette (group discussions). We have contributed our views to the City Centre Southern Arc Area Development Framework Draft, to the Natural Heritage Draft Strategy and the Chambers St Realm Project. We have written on behalf of the OTA about the proposed siting of Olympic rings on Edinburgh Castle where we thought the site was inappropriate and on the difficulties in the Council Property Services and the issue of Statutory Notices because we felt it was important not to lose the ability to enforce common repairs.

Our thrice-yearly newsletters, edited by Robin Tait and Rosemary Mann, continue to offer opinions, articles and information for members. The newsletters cover a diverse range of issues and are enlightening, challenging and well-regarded. We have three meetings a year where members are able to raise concerns and discuss policies. Our programme of activities arranged by Naomi Richardson has been varied, stimulating and well-attended by members and friends. Activities included visits to the Royal Observatory, the Inch Nursery, the Council Museum Collections Centre, backstage at the Festival Theatre, and the Burns Monument and Poetry Garden. We have had talks on costume and the visit of George IV by Annie Scanlon, the archaeological work on the Old College quadrangle by Tom Addyman, the John Murray Archive by David McClay at the National Library, the progress of the work on the National Portrait Gallery by James Holloway, the management and use of historic graveyards by Susan Buckham and a talk on the Scottish Cemetery in Calcutta by James Simpson organised jointly with the Cockburn Association.

Members of the Old Town Association Committee have been indefatigable in their efforts on behalf of the Association and I would like to thank them for their commitment. Committee members work on a voluntary basis and are generous with their time in dealing with Old Town issues. Robin Tait, Rosemary Mann and Naomi Richardson have already been mentioned in their roles respectively of Newsletter Editors and Activities Organiser. Thanks are also due to Rosemary Mann as Treasurer and webmistress, Bill Cowan as Planning Officer, Eleanor Peat as Membership Secretary and to Committee members Eric Drake, Anja Amsel and Roma Crampin. I am grateful to Anja and Roma for their experience and good advice. We are fortunate to welcome Fenella Kerr and Katie Kerr to the Committee. Rose McKenzie retired as Secretary in 2011 and we thank her for her work for the OTA and wish her well for the future. We really need a Minutes Secretary so if you would be willing to undertake this role or indeed would like to serve on the Committee please get in touch!

The current membership of the OTA is 272 individual members and 18 corporate members. I would like to thank all our members for their loyalty and support. The finances of the Association remain healthy. The Brownlee Trust continues to support projects for young people in the Old Town. Much more information about the OTA including our newsletters can be found on the OTA website – www.eota.org.uk. It is well worth a visit!

Finally, although I think it has been a difficult time for the Old Town I am not despondent because there have been positive events. Individuals on the OTA Committee and the Old Town Association itself contributed to the publication of Jean Bareham's book *Hidden Gardens of the Royal Mile*. The book was reviewed in our January newsletter and is a recommended read. There is also too the story of the Wardrop's Court dragons which will have a happy ending when the dragons are restored and placed back in Wardrop's Court. The Old Town Association with the assistance of the Old Edinburgh Club was able to help an enquirer via the website with information about the Holyrood Gymnastic Club.

In the future there will be problems for the OTA to face and issues to be dealt with but, as in the past 36 years, the Association will endeavour to do its best for the good of the Old Town.

Barbara Logue
Convener