



# Edinburgh Old Town Association

## Convener's Report 2014

A stroll round Edinburgh's Old Town at any time of the year is an enjoyable and worthwhile experience. There are the many historic buildings to admire – Edinburgh Castle, St Giles Cathedral, Holyrood Palace, Gladstone's Land, the Central Library and the tenements in the Royal Mile – to name but a few. There are the views to the Cowgate from South Bridge and George IV Bridge and there are the hidden green spaces throughout the Old Town. Ongoing construction work to develop and, it is to be hoped, improve areas of the city is apparent. Huge cranes on the skyline at East Market Street, Holyrood Road and on the fringe of the Old Town area at the former Chatham garage site at Abbeymount are testament to the building work being undertaken. The walker is aware too that work has begun on the gap site at New Street/Calton Road and that Castle Rock/Edinvar Housing Association is building 40 affordable flats in Calton Road itself. However, it is noticeable that the number of shops selling cheap tartan goods continues to grow. There has also been a sustained increase in cafés and eateries in the area. In fact, George IV Bridge is now almost a retail-free zone thanks to the over-provision of food outlets in the street. Hotels like Ibis, Motel One and Apex cater for the many tourists who visit Edinburgh throughout the year. It could be argued that for good or ill the Old Town is dependent on a service economy. The demise of the Royal Bank of Scotland at North Bridge where it provided a service to local residents and businesses for many years is regrettable. It is obvious to the onlooker that there are traffic management issues in the area that have to be addressed. Cars and buses are being driven too quickly for the prevailing conditions in Victoria Street and in the Canongate inconsiderate parking is a problem particularly at the weekend. The drivers of the 35 buses have great difficulty in manoeuvring their vehicles between the parked cars.

The re-establishment of the Old Town Community Council is a positive step for local democracy. The Council ceased to exist at the end of 2013 but was reconstituted in May 2014 thanks to the efforts of local people and Councillors. As well as a connection to the Community Council the OTA has maintained links with the Cockburn Association, the Civic Forum, the MESH project, the Scottish Civic Trust, the Royal Mile Business Association, the City Centre Neighbourhood Partnership and Edinburgh World Heritage. We were able to support EWH in their application for funding from Historic Scotland. Unfortunately there have been disappointments too. There have been no further meetings or developments after the Holyrood Palace Thinking Day mentioned in my report last year and it would appear that the Safer Communities Forum is in abeyance with the advent of Police Scotland and a change in priorities. The closure of post-boxes in the High Street area during the Festival led to a lengthy correspondence with Royal Mail. Throughout we were supported by our local Councillors, our MSP and our MP. We are grateful for their support in this and other matters.

Bill Cowan, our Planning Secretary, has, as always, monitored planning applications for the OTA and we are grateful for his diligence. We have had varying degrees of success. The OTA objected to the planning applications for the proposed Wetherspoon pubs in Nicolson Street and Waverley Bridge – the former application was refused and the latter was granted. We have objected to the granting of planning applications for yet more cafés but were unsuccessful regarding 30 North Bridge which is now a Pret a Manger. On a more frivolous note planning permission was granted for a red telephone box in the High Street to be converted into an ATM! We have written to the City of Edinburgh Council to ask that the OTA be involved in any decision to replace setts in some of our local streets.

Our thrice-yearly newsletters continue to offer stimulating, informative and educational articles to our members. The photographic sections have become a popular feature of the newsletters. Robin Tait who edited the newsletter for a number of years has decided to step down and Eric Drake and Rosemary Mann are now joint editors. We appreciate Robin's efforts and are pleased that he is happy to remain on the Committee. This year, as usual, we have had an interesting and diverse programme of activities. There were talks on Edinburgh's Cinemas, Patrick Geddes, Mapping Edinburgh's Social History (MESH), graffiti and on the history of Pantomime – appropriately enough at Christmas time. Visits were arranged to Bo'ness – to the Hippodrome Cinema and the Steam Railway, a Film Evening in the Scotsman, the Signet Library, the Centre for Carbon Innovation, MacDonald Armouries and the CCTV Control Unit in the City Chambers. Our thanks are due to our Activities Secretary, Naomi Richardson, who is responsible for the research and organisation of all these events. The OTA has three members' meetings per year when members are invited to express their opinions and raise issues.

I have already mentioned Bill Cowan, Rosemary Mann, Naomi Richardson, Eric Drake and Robin Tait as members of the Committee and I would like to express my thanks and those of the OTA membership to them and to the other Committee members – Rosemary Mann in her role as Treasurer, Jean Fairbairn as Minutes Secretary, Roma Crampin as Membership Secretary, Katie Kerr and Anja Amsel. I am pleased to welcome Laura Harrington to the Committee but I am sorry to report that Fenella Kerr has resigned from the Committee because of other commitments. I am sure that all our members appreciate the sterling work and commitment of all the members of the OTA Committee who serve on a voluntary basis. We would welcome new members to the Committee –our meetings are monthly- so if you are interested please get in touch!

Financially, the OTA is in good heart:

<b>Summary Accounts for year to 31.08.14</b>		Receipts	Payments	Surplus/ (Deficit)
Events		1,933	1,118	815
Donations made			600	(600)
All other receipts and payments		1,600	1,817	(217)
<b>Total</b>		<b>£3,533</b>	<b>£3,535</b>	<b>(£2)</b>
Balances	31.08.13	Receipts	Payments	31.08.14
	£6,504	£3,533	£3,535	£6502

The higher than usual expenditure included £500 spent on upgrading the website – money well spent, I am sure you will agree. We also gave two donations to the Scottish Historic Buildings Trust: £300 for poetry workshops for school-kids and £300 towards the Lego exhibition which brought lots of people of all ages to Riddle's Court. The OTA was also delighted to offer support to the Brownlee Old Town Trust for its grant of Lego for the Central Library which brings young people (especially boys) into the Old Town and into the Library.

Current membership of the Association is 229 individual members and 11 corporate members. I would like to thank all our members for their continued loyalty and support. We also welcome new members. For existing members and potential members who are interested in more information about the OTA including newsletters, future activities, links to other relevant websites, current issues and a booklist I recommend our completely updated website [www.eota.org.uk](http://www.eota.org.uk). We look forward to your comments!

Barbara Logue  
Convener