



# Edinburgh Old Town Association Newsletter

April 2012

Elections to the City Council will take place on Thursday 3 May. The Old Town Association wants Councillors who are willing to provide strong support to us as members of the community, irrespective of party.

With this in mind, the Old Town Association wrote to the parties involved in the forthcoming elections setting out our Old Town concerns and asking for their views – making it clear that their responses would be reported in the newsletter.

Briefly, the points we raised were:

- Retail provision has deteriorated during the period of the outgoing Council, with fast food shops and outlets selling low-quality merchandise taking over to an unhealthy degree.
- The lack of control of goods-for-sale obstructing the pavements and hanging on the outside of shops, flags and advertisements placed on and around shop fronts and noise pollution provided by ‘music’ directed into the street from shop doorways.
- The apparent willingness of the Council to give in to the demands of property developers – Caltongate is the supreme example. This provides short-term gain for the City coffers, but the longer term deterioration of our Old Town and its unique attractions.

In recent years, a series of initiatives has been undertaken to improve the situation, but these haven’t worked. With the legislation presently available, combined with limited enforcement resources, the Council appears unable to make significant progress. Meanwhile, the Cairngorms National Park has been given strong powers over planning matters. Since the present regime is not working, should Edinburgh not be applying to the Scottish Parliament for similar powers? After all, a World Heritage Site has as strong a claim as has a National Park.

The questions posed to our Council candidates were as follows.

- Do you acknowledge that the situation in the Old Town is deteriorating?
- If so, do you agree that a new and effective approach is needed?
- If so, what would you want to see happening?
- Would you seek additional powers?

Out of the five parties contacted responses were received from only two and a tenth. Joanna Mowat (Cons) and Iain Coleman (LibDem) had both obviously devoted considerable time and effort in replying. Both gave a clear ‘yes’ to the first

two questions. As regards the third, they both thought that the way present powers were being employed could and should be made more effective, and Iain Coleman in responding to the fourth question thought that additional powers should be sought from Holyrood. The extra tenth of a reply came from the Scottish Nationalist candidate who acknowledged receipt of the letter. No more.

We hope this information will be of use to you when you decide how to rank the candidates when you vote in May.

## **Gilding the Dragons**

In our last newsletter we ran a story about the disappearance of the dragon brackets of Wardrop's Court and the happy discovery that they had been removed for restoration.



*Paul McAuley of the City Museum Collections Centre with the repaired and repainted dragons.*



*Applying gilding to one of the dragons.*

We can report that the dragons are now in the final stages of restoration. They should be reinstated in the pend of Wardrop's Court in April. These photographs were taken at a wee ceremony to hand over the grant from the Brownlee Old Town Trust to the students who have done the work and to Edinburgh World Heritage which has supported the restoration.

## **Esplanade Stands**

One of the reasons put forward for new stands on the Esplanade was the shorter time required to assemble and dismantle them, operations which inevitably cause disturbance to the local inhabitants. Last year, the first year of the new stands, they took longer than intended to assemble, partly due to the theft of components awaiting assembly, but the dismantling went well. A good augury, it was thought.

But ... when the planning consent was sought and received for the new stands, for some extraordinary reason no limit was placed on the period of time each year for which they could be left in place on the Esplanade. As a result, the City Council has no control over this. We now hear that this year they are to be put up for considerably longer than in previous years, apparently in order to host a one-off event, but that this will not be used as a precedent in future years.

The stands are not particularly elegant and they limit the glorious view to be experienced from the Esplanade. One suspects that there will be a great deal of anger in the Old Town if an extended stay does take place in future years.

## **Holyrood Gymnastic Club and Wolfhounds**

The Old Town Association had an enquiry through our website asking if any of our members had come across the Holyrood Gymnastic Club. Ika Peiler and her husband, in Ireland, have an interest in Irish Wolfhounds, and discovered that one H D Richardson, having lived in Edinburgh as a young man, was later to be found in Dublin, where he had saved the Wolfhound breed from extinction in the mid-1800s.

Richardson was obviously an enthusiastic person with a broad range of interests. Ika found that he had written a book about dogs in 1847, also various pamphlets about other domestic animals and that he had a great interest in natural history and in sports.

Copies of a number of his publications, published in London or Dublin between 1847 and 1852 are held at the National Library of Scotland, although *'Holiday Sports and Pastimes for Boys'* is not amongst them. This book, with a strong Edinburgh flavour, dates from 1848, and is about Highland Games, swimming and angling at Newhaven. In athletics, he claimed that he 'invented' a better, more efficient style for the standing high leap which was an event in the Highland Games.

After all this athleticism, readers may be craving a few minutes of rest and quiet contemplation by now, but stay with us just a bit longer, as this is where the story starts to come together.

Amongst her discoveries, Ika found a mention of the Holyrood Gymnastic Club. We made enquiries, but also passed her query to members of the Old Edinburgh Club. Professor Bob Morris, an economic and social historian, found an entry in *The Scotsman* from August 1836 reporting on a meeting at the Rossllyn Gymnastic Club, and there was Richardson, representing the

Holyrood Club, winning the standing jump at five feet and half an inch! Oh, and Professor Morris has a relative in Ireland who, believe it or not, also has a keen interest in Irish Wolfhounds!

## **Bouquets and Brickbats**

Your committee considers all planning applications submitted for properties in the Old Town. Most are let through without comment, others receive praise or condemnation and representations are made where appropriate. Below we list some where we have commented in recent months:

Bouquets to the Council for refusing change of use from retail to restaurant, café or bar for 81 Grassmarket and 34 Cockburn Street. Brickbats to the Council for 8 and 34 St Mary's Street where change of use to restaurant, café or bar has been granted. These mean that St Mary's Street, designated in the current Local Plan as a Speciality Shopping Street, is in danger of going the way of George IV Bridge and becoming a street of food outlets. Win some, lose some.

Sometimes the process gets short-circuited by a very public stushie. The proposal to hang giant Olympic rings and the Paralympic logo on the north face of the Castle was withdrawn, much to everybody's relief. A subsequent proposal was submitted to put the rings and logo on the Mound. As this is where advertising has been allowed in the past, we made no comment. The decision is awaited.

Let us hope that the stushie that has arisen from the application for a Ferris Wheel for Princes Street Gardens will also result in it being withdrawn. When you live in the Old Town, green space is precious and Princes Street Gardens is a rare place to relax in green and peaceful surroundings. A Ferris Wheel would be, as the Cockburn Association said, a plook on the face of Edinburgh.

## Cigarettes and matches

We ran an article three years ago on the Scotch Whisky Experience on Castlehill when it was reopened following the revamp of the tour that illustrates the history of whisky and how it is produced. With an attractive presentation in fifteen languages and a favourable location, Marketing Manager Julie Hunter was able to report that the organisation has since gone from strength to strength despite the economic problems, with annual attendance there now running at well over a quarter of a million.



They have recently been giving their shop a makeover, and readers may have seen the recent article in the evening paper about their unusual discovery. Under the floorboards was a strange collection of discarded items dating back probably to the 1950s, including ancient cigarette packets and match boxes, some glass ink pots and most curiously, a tin of Royal Baking Powder. The cigarettes and matches could well have been discarded by long-ago building workers, while the ink

pots probably date back to earlier days when the building was the home of Castle Hill Primary School, but the baking powder - who knows?

The accompanying photograph of some of the buried treasure may remind our more mature readers of their younger days, though we hesitate to suggest of their school days! Acknowledgements and thanks to the Scotch Whisky Experience for the photograph.

## Hey, Good Lookin'!

Recent newsletters have contained articles about the deterioration of the quality of goods for sale in the Old Town and the manner in which they are displayed. For a change, in this newsletter we have decided to show you some shop displays that have captured our attention for the opposite reason: they are enticing, intriguing and fun.



Colour coordination in Ragamuffin at Canongatehead and attractive shutters of Hannah Zakari in Candlemaker Row





Above is an enticing display at Miss Katie Cupcake in Cockburn Street. Left, An explosion of colour at The Red Door Gallery in Victoria Street. Below, less is more at Ness in the High Street. We could show you more ... and perhaps you have your favourites you have found in the highways and byways of Old Edinburgh.



## Summer Activities 2012

**Seafield Recycling Centre, Portobello.** Wednesday 25th & Thursday 26th April, 2.00 pm. The centre at Seafield has taken over from the previous one at Powderhall. Come along and see what happens to some of the vast amount of rubbish which Edinburgh generates. Buses 19, 25, 49 but not 12, to Fillyside Road, Seafield, EH7 6RD. Members only, numbers limited, tickets £3. **Please state which date.**

**Riddle's Court and the Scottish Historic Buildings Trust.** Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> May, 7.00 pm. Riddle's Court, 322 Lawnmarket. Una Richards, Director of the Scottish Historic Buildings Trust, will explain the history and aims of the organisation, which now has its headquarters in this important, historic set of buildings in the Lawnmarket. Members' guests welcome, tickets £3. Members of the Edinburgh Swiss Club will be attending.

**Members' meeting and talk by Council Community Safety Officers** Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> June, 7 pm. Quaker Meeting House. Val Devenney, one of our local CEC Community Safety Officers, will explain their role in our community. Also a chance to discuss current issues. Members' guests welcome. No charge, but please apply for tickets to give us an idea of numbers.

**Hidden Gardens of the Royal Mile.** Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> June, 6.30 pm. Join Jean Bareham for a tour down the Royal Mile to visit the green surprises to be found down its closes and in its courtyards, and hear their history: a world of historical and horticultural treasures await you! Meet at John Knox House. Members only, numbers limited, tickets £5 (this is a repeat of the tour of summer 2009).

**Burntisland: Museum of Communications and Parish Church.** Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> July, 12 noon (museum) and 2.30 pm (church). Make your own way to Burntisland to explore two very different but fascinating venues. The Museum has a fascinating collection: it specialises in communications technology from the pre-electric optical telegraph to state-of-the-art devices. The kirk is famous as it has the first centrally orientated plan and important historical associations. We will be taken around by the minister. Members' guests welcome. Tickets £5

### Dates for your Diaries

**Mondays** 12 noon to 1 pm at Dance Base, Grassmarket. Free weekly dance class for the over-50s. Dances in a range of styles with music from the 1950s to today. Just turn up or, for more information, contact Janet Dick on 0131 226 9653 or [janet@dancebase.co.uk](mailto:janet@dancebase.co.uk)

**Thursday 19th April**, 7.00-9.00 pm, City Chambers. 2012 Local Government Election Hustings with City Centre Ward nd party representatives, organised by Edinburgh Active Citizenship Group and chaired by Lesley Riddoch. No booking required.

**Monday 30th April.** Beltane Festival on Calton Hill – lots of fireworks and flames! More information at <http://beltane.org/>

**Wednesday 13th & Thursday 14th June.** The Olympic Torch will pass through Edinburgh on its way from Dunfermline to Alnwick. Wednesday, from 6 pm, the torch will pass along Lauriston Place, Forrest Road, Lawnmarket to the Castle. Thursday, the torch will leave the Castle at 6.30 am, through the Old Town to Holyrood Park and out towards Duddingston.

**Saturday 30th June.** Edinburgh will celebrate Armed Forces Day with a parade through the Old Town followed by activities in West Princes Street Gardens.

**August 9th to September 1st.** 'Speed of Light' runs in Holyrood Park.

**10 to 31 August** William Wallace at Holyrood. Exhibition in the Scottish Parliament featuring the 1303 Wallace letter, on loan from the National Archives in Kew, and the letter from Wallace to the mayor and citizens of Lubeck of 1297, on loan from Lubeck.