



# Edinburgh Old Town Association Newsletter

September 2018

## **Killing the goose that lays the golden eggs?**

At the time of writing the Fringe Festival was drawing to a close after what looks likely to be yet another record year in terms of the numbers of shows, performers and spectators. Part of the Fringe's marketing this year has been what they described as "a small flock of golden pigeons ... hidden in iconic Edinburgh landmarks". The public were invited "to hunt these pigeons down and shoot them, with their phone camera". This brings to mind the story of the goose that laid the golden eggs.

As you'll remember, the story was that a man and his wife owned a goose that every day would lay a golden egg. This made the couple rich but they decided they would get richer, faster if they could have all the golden eggs which they thought must be inside the goose. So, the couple killed the goose and cut her open, only to find that she had no golden eggs inside her at all, and now the precious goose was dead. The moral of the story is that too much greed results in nothing.

That is a moral which should be taken to heart in Edinburgh. As we have said in previous Newsletters, events like the Fringe bring colour and interest to the city and those of us who live in or know the Old Town can derive great pleasure from sharing it with appreciative tourists. But the fragile Old Town environment can only cope with so much. It is not only locals who can feel swamped by the sheer numbers of visitors on the pavements, the coaches and tour buses clogging the streets, the proliferation of tartan tat shops, canned music, noisy buskers. Eventually visitors will be put off – the goose laying the golden eggs will be dead.

Edinburgh is not alone in facing such issues. Barcelona and Prague are just two other historic European cities struggling to maintain living communities while still welcoming tourists. Venice is often held up as a dire example of what happens when the interests of local residents are swamped by those of tourism, turning a once vibrant city into a "hollow shell museum". The evidence that Edinburgh's Old Town could be heading that way has been mounting alarmingly. Newspaper headlines such as "Edinburgh 'held hostage' by Airbnb" and "Foreign investors snap up Edinburgh property" are not mere journalistic hype but are based on the outcome of solid research by the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors and others. Concerns have been expressed across the political spectrum from Graham Simpson, Scottish Conservative Housing Spokesman, who has acknowledged that residents are suffering as a result of antisocial behaviour by visitors and stressed the need "to make sure we strike the right balance between limiting short-term lets and supporting our tourism industry", to Andy Wightman, Green MSP, who has spoken of "a modern-day clearance taking place in the centre of Edinburgh".

And yet, as we have had cause to say before, sometimes it has seemed that those responsible for promoting the City have taken a simplistic and narrowly-focused view that more is necessarily good when it comes to tourism – more visitors, more tourist shops, more hotels, more student flats which double as tourist accommodation, more residential accommodation turned over to short term lettings. But the City Council is finally acknowledging that there is a problem. In January they released a dossier revealing the extent of the challenges created by tourism: for example, that spending on cleaning services and complaints about waste have risen sharply since 2014. Kate Campbell, the council’s housing and economy convener, accepted that residents were suffering and said that she saw regulation of short-term lets as the way forward.

Fine words, but as it is said, they butter no parsnips. So it is encouraging to see some indicators of a firmer stance by the council. One such indicator is the unanimous decision of the Transport and Environment Committee to ban all on-street advertising structures, including A-boards. The ban is to be rolled out towards the end of this year and the council say that for the first 12 to 18 months it will be enforced by a dedicated team of officers to ensure “awareness and compliance”. The larger advertising structures – the garden shed type structures – have already gone. The photo essay in this Newsletter features some of these unlamented intrusions on our streetscape snapped just before they disappeared, let’s hope, into history.

Another hopeful sign is what seems to be an increased willingness to take action against breaches of planning guidelines by tourist accommodation providers. For example, in June the council’s Development Management Sub-Committee considered retrospective applications for the change of use of flats in Old Fishmarket Close from residential to commercial holiday let. The applications were rejected, taking account of officials’ advice that the proposals did not comply with the development plan or the non-statutory guidelines as the change of use would result in an adverse impact on residential amenity. Let’s hope this marks a new trend.

## Advertising Sheds

In May this year, a walk from the Tron to the Lawnmarket took you past twelve large advertising sheds, now no more. Many used the dimensions of the standard 4ft by 8ft builder’s board or the A1 poster. Some were classier than others, and one politely covered a utilities cabinet!







All photos: Rosemary Mann

## 100 days, 100 years

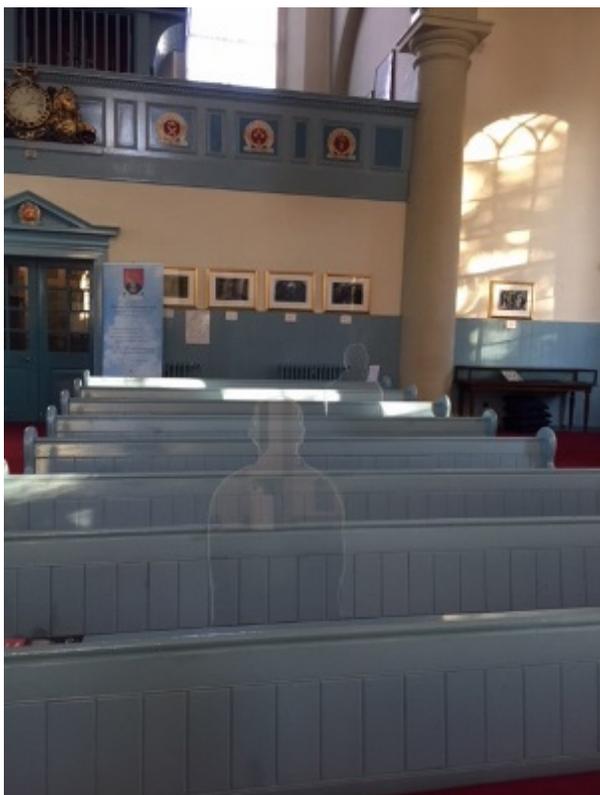
We are now into the period marking the centenary of the last hundred days of World War One. Those hundred days began with the Battle of Amiens in early August 1918 and, of course, ended with the Armistice which came into effect at 11.00 a.m. on 11 November 1918.

Looking at the Edinburgh newspapers of the time, the Armistice seems to have been celebrated in the city in a surprisingly restrained way. As *The Scotsman* put it, “There was no outburst of unbridled demonstration. The public took the news joyously and thankfully, but in the main quietly”. A special issue of *The Evening News* appeared on the streets at 10.45 a.m. and was eagerly bought up. Flags were hoisted at the City Chambers, church bells were rung and military bands played in Princes Street and the High Street between 12 and one o’clock. Informal processions formed up in the afternoon, including off-duty servicemen, munition girls and students. The student groups included many young women and the papers noted that they were “rather more orderly and less boisterous than student processions in Edinburgh in the past”. “All Edinburgh” came out in the evening. The Lord Provost had said that the evening would mark an end to “the dark and dismal war street lights” but workmen had only had time to remove the obscuring paint from a small proportion of lamps. Crowds were described as happy and joyous, but orderly. Among the rejoicing were reminders of tragedy, such as a young widow dressed in black. Finally, the papers noted that “The early retiring habits acquired during the war period began to show their sedative influence by ten o’clock, after which the city quickly quietened down”.

In the Old Town there are two on-going commemorations of the last 100 days of World War One. In the National War Museum in the Castle there is an exhibition running until 27 January 2019 looking at the poppy as a symbol of remembrance. For more information see “Events and Happenings” below.

The Canongate Kirk is taking part in a nationwide commemoration called “There But Not There”. This involves the placing of

transparent military silhouettes in various locations around the country to commemorate those who died in World War One to educate all generations about why they made the ultimate sacrifice, and to raise funds for those suffering from the hidden wounds of war. The Canongate Kirk has five silhouettes recalling five casualties commemorated on family tombstones in the kirkyard: three who died on the Western Front and two brothers, one killed in the Gretna Green train crash in 1915 and the other killed in what is now Iraq.



*There But Not There.* Photo: Canongate Kirk

The Rev Neil Gardner, Minister of the Canongate Kirk has commented that “the silhouettes will remind us of those who did not come home when it was finally all over and whose absence left a huge gap”. The Canongate War memorial lists the names of 238 men from that part of the Old Town who died in the war. *The Evening News*, in a piece written just before the outbreak of the Second World War and looking back to the First, commented “the Royal Mile was practically stripped of its manhood. In some stairs not a fit man was left”. The silhouettes will be in place in the Canongate Kirk until 11 November. The kirk is open to the public on most days during September.

### ***Picturesque “Bits” from Old Edinburgh***

This is the evocative title of a very rare photobook held by the National Library of Scotland. It dates from 1868 and consists of text by Thomas Henderson describing various parts of the Old Town, accompanied by albumen photographs taken by Archibald Burns. Archibald Burns (1831-1880) was a landscape and architectural photographer and worked from Rock House on Carlton Hill, the former home of photographic pioneer David Octavius Hill.

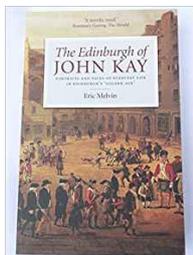


*Capital Collections* ([www.capitalcollections.org.uk](http://www.capitalcollections.org.uk)).  
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The copy of the book held by the National Library was showing its age: the cover and spine were damaged and weakened, some pages were torn and the binding was strained. A modest donation from the Old Town Association has allowed the Library to undertake necessary conservation work on the photobook including surface cleaning of pages, repairs to the spine and lining and the incorporation of archival material to ensure the longevity of these early and sensitive photographs. Non Jones, Development Officer at the National Library, said “We really appreciate the help given by the Old Town Association. It’s another example of how backing by sponsors and donors can help preserve Scotland’s precious heritage”.

## Books with an Old Town Interest

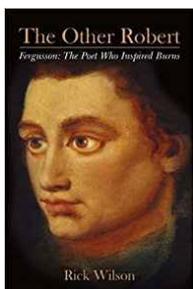
New books dealing with the Old Town or with people who lived and worked here continue to appear regularly. Three recent ones which may interest Association members are described below.



***The Edinburgh of John Kay: portraits and tales of everyday life in Edinburgh's 'golden age'***, Eric Melvin, 2017. John Kay (1742-1826) was a self-taught artist and engraver who had come to

Edinburgh as a young man to work as a barber and hairdresser. In 1784 he abandoned his craft and for the next 38 years he sketched and engraved his contemporaries. Some 329 of his engravings, with accompanying notes, were published posthumously as Kay's Portraits in 1837. This remarkable man has left us images of intellectual giants of 'The Golden Age' such as Joseph Black, James Hutton and Adam Smith; notable eccentrics such as Lord Gardenstone; the formidable Lord Braxfield; the notorious Deacon William Brodie and a host of colourful characters who walked past his workshop in the Parliament Close.

Eric Melvin's book charts Kay's career but also through it touches on key Edinburgh events of his time including the trials of William Brodie and Thomas Muir, George IV's visit in 1822 and the great fire of 1824. Reviewing the book in *The Herald* Rosemary Goring described it as "a terrific read" and she's right. Eric Melvin will be speaking at an Association members' meeting on 22 October (see OTA Activities, below, for details).



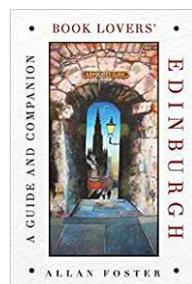
***The Other Robert: Fergusson the Poet Who Inspired Burns***, Rick Wilson, 2018. Described by Burns as "my elder brother in Misfortune/By far my elder brother in the Muse", Fergusson was very much a

son of the Old Town. He was born in 1750 in Cap and Feather Close (later demolished to make way for the North Bridge) and died just 24 years later in the pauper lunatic asylum

which stood where the Bedlam Theatre is now on the corner of Forrest Road. He began writing poetry while he was a student at St Andrews. One of his early compositions almost got him expelled from the University when he took the opportunity of saying grace before dinner to make a dig at the monotonous student diet with the following quatrain:

For rabbits young and for rabbits old  
For rabbits hot and rabbits cold  
For rabbits tender and for rabbits tough  
Our thanks we render for we've had enough

He left St Andrews early, not because of this brush with the University authorities but because his father died and he had to return to Edinburgh to work to support his family. It was while working here as a clerk copyist that he produced the bulk of his poetry. Rick Wilson's biography gives a good account of Fergusson's short life and tragic death. Equally valuable, it includes a good selection of Fergusson's poetry, both in Scots and standard English.



***Book Lovers' Edinburgh: a Guide and Companion***, Allan Foster, 2018. As the title suggests, this book covers the whole of Edinburgh. However, there is a substantial section devoted to the Old Town. This

reminds us of the many writers with Old Town connections: to name just a few, James Boswell, David Hume, Robert Burns, Walter Scott and more recently Muriel Spark, J K Rowling, Ian Rankin and Quintin Jardine. Allan Foster says that a good guidebook should not tell you any more than you want to know or have time to absorb, and suggests using his book like a treasure map telling you where to dig. It does that job very well and however well readers know the Old Town they are likely to dig some nuggets of new and surprising knowledge from the book.

## Your Association needs you

The Old Town Association is first and foremost a membership organisation and as such we are always delighted to welcome new members. With that in mind we have recently

revised our membership leaflet which explains what the Association does and how to join it. Copies of the new leaflet are enclosed with this Newsletter. If you think any of your family and friends might be interested in joining the Association please give them a leaflet. Further copies will be available at Association meetings and we aim to have them placed in suitable venues around the Old Town.

*A novel approach to a  
Castle Terrace pot hole!*



## Events and Happenings

*Events are free unless marked with an asterisk. There is no charge for admission to the poppy exhibition at the National War Museum but the museum is within Edinburgh Castle for which there is an admission charge.*

Edinburgh's annual **Doors Open Day** event will take place on Saturday 29 and Sunday 30 September. The event is organised by the Cockburn Association and full details will be posted on their website (<http://www.cockburnassociation.org.uk/>) in September. As in previous years, a variety of Old Town locations will feature.

The current exhibition at the **Queen's Gallery** at the Palace of Holyroodhouse, ***Canaletto and the Art of Venice\****, runs until 21 October. It is followed by ***Charles II: Art & Power\**** which will run from 23 November 2018 to 2 June 2019.

At the **National Museums of Scotland** in Chambers Street the current big exhibition is ***Rip it Up: the story of Scottish Pop\****. This runs until 25 November. ***The Art of Glass***, showcasing fifteen works by leading glass artists in Britain today, runs until 16 September.

At the **National War Museum** in Edinburgh Castle ***The Poppy: A Symbol of Remembrance*** examines the history of the poppy and its emergence as a symbol of remembrance. The exhibition runs until 27 January 2019.

The **City Arts Centre** in Market Street has an exhibition ***In Focus: Scottish Photography*** which showcases their photographic collections, charting the development of fine art photography in Scotland from the 19th century to present day. This runs until 12 May 2019. At the same location ***Edwin G Lucas: an Individual Eye***, which runs until 10 February 2019, looks at the work of a little known 20th century Edinburgh artist while ***Travelling Gallery at 40*** (running until 4 November) tells the story of the converted bus which for four decades has taken art to every part of the country. From 24 November 2018 until 17 March 2019 the City Arts Centre will be showing ***Robert Blomfield: Edinburgh Street Photography***, a chance to see the work of a man whose work between the 1950s and 1970s captured some striking and often amusing images around the city.

At the **Museum of Edinburgh** in the Canongate ***Their Work Is Not Forgotten: Celebrating the centenary of women's suffrage*** explores the past and present of political activism in Edinburgh. This runs until 14 October.

**The People's Story Museum**, also in the Canongate, has an exhibition running until 24 September called ***Alexander Henry: Rifling through a Life***. This looks at the life of the Edinburgh gun-maker best known for the Martini-Henry rifle, the British military rifle of the Victorian era.

At **The Museum of Childhood** in the High Street ***Growing Up With Books*** exhibits a large selection of books from the museum archives, ranging from the 18th century through to the mid-20th century. This runs until 9 December.

**The Dovecot Studio** in Infirmary Street has an exhibition on *Liberty Art Fabrics & Fashion\** running until 12 January 2019. This celebrates Liberty Art Fabrics and their impact on fashion since 1875.

**The Old Edinburgh Club**, Edinburgh's local history society, begins its *winter lecture series\** in October. The first lecture, by Ruth Washbrook on *Growing up in Edinburgh: schooling, sport and social life through the lens of the Scottish Screen Archive* is at 7.00 p.m. on Wednesday 17 October 2018 in the Augustine United Church, 41 George IV Bridge. The full lecture programme is at <http://www.ouldinburghclub.org.uk/Lectures/>. Lectures are open to non-members of the Club for a £5.00 fee.

For talks and events at the **National Library of Scotland** see <https://www.nls.uk/events>. For talks and events at the **Edinburgh Central Library** see <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/edinburgh-reads-1650684470>.

## OTA Activities

**Princes Street Gardens.** Wednesday 19 September, 5.30 p.m. Enjoy a walk with Jean Bareham of Greenyonder Tours, who will lead us around Princes Street Gardens: unique in geology, history, diverse planting, and the myriad ways that folk have used and abused them. This walking tour will also illustrate the proposed new design to replace the Ross Bandstand. A walking tour of both gardens, 1 hour 45 minutes, some steps and steep slopes. Tickets £6. Members only.

**John Kay with Eric Melvin.** Monday 22 October, 7.00 p.m., Quaker Meeting House. Eric Melvin, author of *The Edinburgh of John Kay* (see above) will talk about this fascinating man and his work. John Kay left us images of intellectual giants of 'The Golden Age' such as Joseph Black, James Hutton and Adam Smith; notable eccentrics such as Lord Gardenstone; the formidable Lord Braxfield; the notorious Deacon William Brodie and a host of colourful characters who walked past his workshop in Edinburgh's Parliament Close. Tickets £5. Guests welcome

**The Last Gap site on the Royal Mile.** Wednesday 21 November, 6.00 p.m., Riddles Court. David McGinial, Operations Director of Colorado Construction, will lead an informal session on the construction of the last remaining gap site on the Royal Mile. The project at 123 High Street has thrown up many challenges and this session will look at how these were overcome plus other insights into the development of such a key area of the Old Town. Also in attendance will be the Site Manager and the Stonemason who worked on the project. Tickets £5. Guests welcome.

**Christmas Party.** Thursday 13 December, 7.00 p.m., Augustine United Church, George IV Bridge. Come along for an evening of storytelling, followed by nibbles and wine. Laura Harrington, local guide and storyteller, will regale us with some seasonal tales. Tickets £6. Guests welcome.

## 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 address for ticket applications and subscriptions is: 8 Abbeyhill Crescent, Edinburgh EH8 8DZ. 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 check availability. Then, once you have heard that your tickets have been reserved, pay using 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 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!