



Edinburgh Old Town Association Newsletter

January 2020

*A Happy New Year
to all our readers!*

The main focus of this Newsletter is tourism and its effects on the Old Town. We touch on some of the fake history fed to tourists and some of the real history which could be fed to them and consider the draft tourism strategy on which the City Council has been consulting. The photo essay looks at architectural details around the Old Town which can be spotted “sitting on a bus, front seat at the top”. And we welcome the Crannie – a new facility for residents rather than tourists.

Fake History

Telling tourists nonsense about Edinburgh history is a dubious, but long-established, practice. A century or more ago visitors to Riddles Court were shown the spot where, allegedly, Baillie John MacMorran died and were regaled with tales of the lavish feasts he laid on for Mary Queen of Scots and Bonnie Prince Charlie. This farrago, like much of what the less scrupulous present-day guides dish up, starts from some scraps of truth, distorts them, stirs in a historical celebrity or two and ends up being complete nonsense. MacMorran was the first owner of Riddles Court, but he died in High School Wynd – in 1595, well over a century before Charles Edward Stewart was born. And he was probably little more than a teenager in 1567 when Queen Mary was last in Edinburgh. But after his death Riddles Court was the venue for a lavish feast involving James VI, his wife Anna and her brother Ulric.

Sometimes these dubious stories take on lives of their own. For example, the suggestion that Dickens got the idea for the mean man Ebenezer Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol* from misreading a memorial in the Canongate kirkyard to “Ebenezer Scroggie mealman”. This first appeared in a piece in the Christmas edition of a magazine called *The Erotic Review* in the late 1990s. The piece contained some obvious inaccuracies and inventions, making it clear that it was a spoof, a bit of Christmas fun. There is not, and never was, a memorial to Ebenezer Scroggie in the Canongate kirkyard because no such person ever existed. But since the *Erotic Review* piece appeared the story has been “corrected” and is now presented as fact on the internet and by some of the guides taking groups around the Canongate kirkyard.

Does any of this matter? Isn't entertainment what tourists want from guides, not history lessons? Is there any more harm in dishing out made-up stories than in, say, the invented coat of arms currently on a temporary builder's hoarding off the Canongate showing a cannon above a gate; or a delivery van spotted nearby for a company claiming to have been wild haggis hunters since 1901?





Surely there is a distinction to be made. The builder's hoarding is unlikely to mislead anyone about the historic Canongate arms. Suggesting that the haggis is a wild animal is an amusing fiction but not one that is likely to be widely believed. When it comes to history, entertainment and accuracy need not be exclusive. The peddling of false accounts of Edinburgh history is of a piece with the selling of tartan tat and the wider coarsening of the tourist offer. And it is unnecessary and counter-productive when there is so much fascinating real history to be told...

... For Example

'Cleanse the Causeway' was the heading on an email the Association received in November from an Old Town resident. He went on to say that he wasn't making an enquiry about drainage but was drawing attention to the fact that 30 April 2020 will be the 500th anniversary of an extraordinary event on the High Street which was subsequently dubbed Cleanse the Causeway.

1520 saw a situation all too common in Scottish history: a child monarch – James V was just nine years old – and noble families jockeying for power. The Hamiltons and Douglases were the main contenders. Leaders of both families and their followers were in Edinburgh in April 1520 and it looked as though there might be bloodshed. The Bishop of Dunkeld, a Douglas, asked the Archbishop of Glasgow, a Hamilton, to assure him there would be no trouble. The Archbishop replied "upon my conscience, my lord, I know nothing of the matter", striking his breast to emphasise his sincerity. This produced a rattling sound

because he was wearing armour under his robes. The bishop commented "Your conscience clatters" and hurried back to tell his Douglas relatives to prepare to defend themselves. They gathered in a compact body on the High Street around the top of Blackfriars Wynde (modern Blackfriars Street). Edinburgh citizens supported them and handed them spears. So when the Hamiltons came storming up the hill from the Cowgate, armed with swords, they were at a disadvantage. In the subsequent fighting at least 70, perhaps as many as 300 people were killed – most of them Hamiltons. The amount of blood shed gave rise to the "cleanse the causeway" label.

The Association's email correspondent suggested that there should be some sort of information panel or plaque to commemorate the event, perhaps at the High Street/Blackfriars Street junction.

The Old Town Association supports this suggestion in principle. Perhaps the necessary funding could come from some of the tourist businesses in that area. The City Council's draft tourism strategy for the period to 2030 (of which more below) recommends that "the tourism sector should take a more active role in the development and delivery of the UNESCO World Heritage Site Management Plan in partnership with the relevant agencies in the city". Here's an ideal opportunity to put that into practice.

Draft Tourism Strategy

The City Council has been consulting on a draft tourism strategy covering the period up to 2030. The document is a bit of a curate's egg. It is difficult to read, being presented in an un-user-friendly pale purple font. On top of that it is heavy with statements in opaque Council-speak such as "Technology and data driven solutions should be introduced to improve visitor capacity management in public spaces, visitor attractions and during peak periods" or "Edinburgh should work to improve connectivity to and around the city, including seamless, integrated transport solutions and the development of online and physical wayfinding infrastructure". Eh?

The consultation was denounced in the *Evening News* as ‘trivial box ticking’ failing to address the issues of real concern to residents. That was not entirely fair: there is a limit to how far a broad strategy document can be expected to get into nitty gritty detail. And the draft document does contain some encouraging statements such as ‘Our guiding principle should always be to ask: “how can we improve the quality of life for residents and contribute to the city’s broader economic goals?”’.

That said, there are worrying indications that the City Council remains wedded to the notion that more is self-evidently better when it comes to tourism. The passage from the draft consultation document which was chosen to flag the consultation on the Council’s website began “Tourism is one of the city’s biggest success stories, attracting 4.3 million visits a year. The sector directly employs over 33,000 of the city’s 513,000 residents creating opportunities for residents from across our communities, upskilling our workforce and attracting talent from all over the world”. Is there really evidence that tourism is “upskilling our workforce”? And are those numbers of visits (more than eight visits per resident) necessarily a good thing? Barcelona with a population of over 1.6 million receives eight million visits a year – five for each resident. They decided some years ago that this is too much and have been taking active measures to control the flow and reduce the most harmful impacts. The *Evening News* piece mentioned above was surely right in saying “tourism is not about catching up with European hot spots. It’s about learning those cities which have already been through hell and have had to pull back. Edinburgh has to understand it’s already gone too far and this is not the time to build up the tourist sector”.

The Crannie Community Hub

It is a pleasure to see a new development in our area designed to benefit residents rather than tourists. The developers behind the New Waverley development in and around New Street have funded the conversion into a new community facility in the tenement buildings on the west side of Cranston Street (between

the Canongate and East Market Street). This facility, known as the Crannie, is being managed by the Old Town Development Trust and although only recently opened is already offering a variety of activities such as a cooking club, music jams and ‘Making Memories’ sessions. It also provides a new venue for organisations such as the OTA to hold events. Our AGM on 26 March (of which more below) will take place in the Crannie – an ideal opportunity to come and check out this new venue.



Sitting on a bus, front seat at the top

The Old Town is rich in statues and carvings, architectural details which can easily be overlooked by tourists and residents alike. Many are above street level and so easily overlooked if you are behind the wheel of a car or negotiating the tourist hordes on the pavements. From the top deck of a bus you get an entirely different perspective. Here are some Old Town statues and carvings more easily spotted from that perspective. How many can you locate? Answers are below.



1. Read all about it.



2. Not Lord Byron?



3. Art Deco in the south.



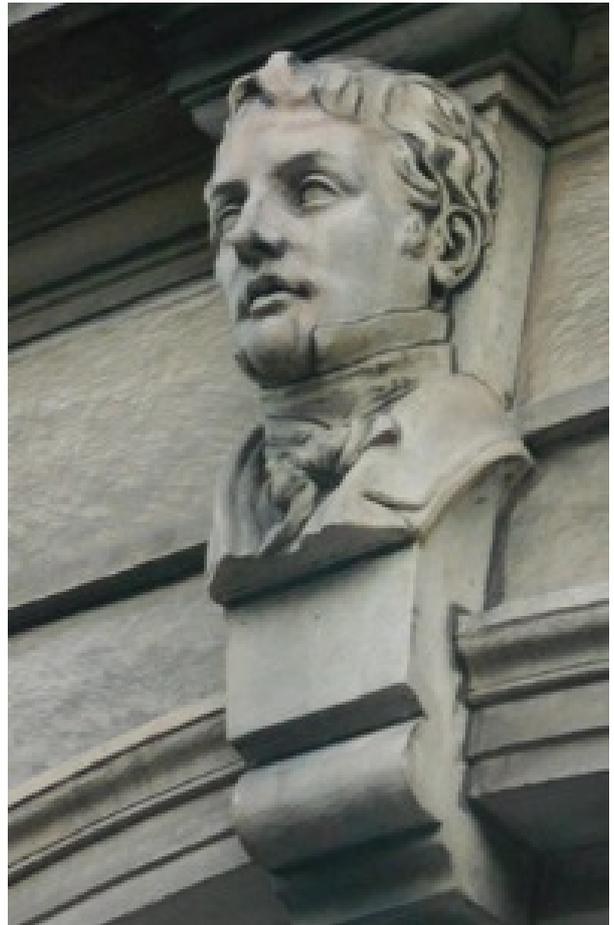
4. Two hard-working lads, not working together.



5. A wake-up call.



6. Strange companions.



7. Feel the bumps - nothing to do with pot-holes.



8. Two well-dressed children ...



9... two who forgot to get dressed ...



10... and a naked golden boy and a draped golden girl.

Answers

1. Peoples' Story sign at Canongate Tollbooth.
2. North side of High Street, south of the Bridges (Byron's Burgers).
3. On the west side of South Bridge.
4. Left: Crown Office on Chamber Street. Right: entrance gate to Heriot's Hospital on Lauriston Place.
5. Central Library.
6. Former Oddfellows' Hall on Forrest Row.
7. Former premises of the Edinburgh Phrenological Society on Chambers Street.
8. Central Library.
9. National Library.
10. Left: Youth Bearing the Torch of Knowledge, Edinburgh University Old College. Right: Fame, Bank of Scotland HQ, Bank Street.

Events and Happenings

The **Open History Society** meets on the last Friday of the month between September and May to hear talks from historians and those interested in and knowledgeable about history. The next talk is on Friday 31 January when David Smale will give a talk on *The Scottish Radical War of 1820*. Go to www.openhistorysociety.org/ for information about other talks. Talks start at 7.30 pm at the Royal Scots Club, Abercromby Place and are free to members, £5 to non-members.

The current series of lectures of the **Old Edinburgh Club** can be found at 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 15 January: *Music and Theatre in 18th Century Edinburgh* by David Todd,
- Wednesday 12 February: *April 1884: Edinburgh University celebrates its Tercentenary*, by Robert Anderson,
- Wednesday 11 March: *The Archaeology of Edinburgh*, by Tom Addyman & Phil Karsgaard.

The **Costume Society Scotland** holds regular lectures in Augustine United Church, 41 George IV Bridge. Lectures start at 7.30 pm (tea/coffee from 7.00 pm, charge for non-members). Upcoming talks are:

- Monday 6 January: *Better is the Proud Plaid, clothing of the '45* by Jenn Scott,
- Monday 3 February: *Fashion in the Collection of the National Galleries of Scotland* by Professor Chris Breward,
- Monday 2 March: *Little Black Dress* by Georgina Ripley,
- Monday 6 April: *Early Plaid Wearing in Scotland* by David Caldwell.

For talks and events at **Edinburgh Central Library** and the **National Library of Scotland** see www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/edinburgh-reads-1650684470 and www.nls.uk/events. There are currently two exhibitions at the National Library. *Northern Lights: The Scottish Enlightenment* runs until 18 April and explores Scotland's leading role in the intellectual and scientific progress of the late 18th century. *At the Water's Edge* displays photographs from the newly acquired MacKinnon Collection of historic photographs depicting life and work at Scotland's coasts and waterways in the 19th and early 20th centuries (until 15 February). The MacKinnon Collection is now jointly owned by the National Library of Scotland and National Galleries of Scotland. A related exhibition (also running until 15 February) at the Portrait Gallery in Queen Street has a wider selection of photographs from the collection including several 19th century views of the Old Town.

The current exhibition at the **Queen's Gallery** at the Palace of Holyrood House (running until 15 March) is *Leonardo da Vinci: a Life in Drawing*, with 80 of the Renaissance master's greatest drawings in the Royal Collection, forming the largest group of Leonardo's works ever shown in

Scotland. 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.

The City Arts Centre in Market Street has an exhibition *Classical Edinburgh*, a celebration of Edinburgh’s neo-classical architecture as seen through the eyes of two architectural photographers, Edwin Smith and Colin McLean, and marking a new edition of *The Making of Classical Edinburgh* by A J Youngson, first published in 1966. For other exhibitions, see www.edinburghmuseums.org.uk/whats-on

The next major temporary exhibition at the **National Museum of Scotland** in Chambers

Street, starting on 23 January and running until 4 May, will be *Tyrannosaurs*, bringing the latest discoveries in palaeontology to life and challenging preconceptions about these ferocious predators. Entry charges apply. At the same museum (and free) are *Parasites* (until 19 April), *The Luxury of Time*, clocks from 1550-1750 from the John C. Taylor collection (until 26 January) and *Chinese Oracle Bones* (until 29 March).

The current major exhibition at **The Dovecot Studio** in Infirmary Street is *May Morris, Life and Work*, a landmark exhibition exploring the life and work of May Morris, one of the most significant artists of the British Arts and Crafts movement, though over-shadowed by her father, William Morris. Entry charges apply.

OTA Activities

Royal College of Physicians, Wednesday 29 January, 2.00 pm, 11 Queen Street. The Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh (started in Edinburgh’s Old Town in 1681) has been in its current home in Queen Street since the 1840s. Iain Milne, RCPE Head of Heritage, will show us round the College’s historic and beautiful rooms and tell us about a few of the fascinating items housed in the unique collection. There will also be an opportunity to see the current exhibition - Moonstruck. Tickets £7. **Members only.**

Rare Books Department, Monday 24 February, 2.00 pm, Edinburgh University Library, 30 George Square. Edinburgh University holds one of the world’s greatest collections, Founded in 1582 and still growing, it includes rare books, archives and manuscripts, art, historical musical instruments and a wide range of other museum objects from geological specimens to anatomical models. Curated by specialist staff across 45 different sites within the University, they are used for teaching, research and by the wider community. The visit, led by Dr Fran Baseby, CRC Services Manager, will provide an opportunity to see the facilities at the Centre for Research Collections and a selection of treasures from the rare books and archive collections. There will also be time to visit the current exhibition *Touching Stitches*. Tickets £7. **Members only.**

Annual General Meeting and Talk, Thursday 26 March, 6.30 pm, The Crannie, 9 Cranston Street. The AGM is your opportunity to hear the reports of the last year and raise any issues or concerns with the committee. The meeting will be preceded by a talk by Clive Waghorn on Edinburgh’s “Foule Burn”. No cost, but please let us know if you want to come. 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 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.*

Scottish Courts and Parliament Hall, Monday 20 April, 2.30 pm, 11 Parliament Square. Parliament House is a complex of several buildings housing the Supreme Courts of Scotland. The original building was home to the pre-Union Parliament of Scotland from 1639 to 1707. We shall take a tour of a court, the Laigh Hall and Parliament Hall itself – and some old dungeons! Note: Parts of the tour are unsuitable for those with mobility problems. Tickets £7. **Members only.**