



Edinburgh Old Town Association

Convener's Report 2021

For many people 2021 was an unsettled and unsettling year. However, by the end of a year of ups and downs there seemed to be some optimism that a return to 'normality' was possible. The response of the City of Edinburgh Council to Covid-19 was 'Spaces for People' to make streets safe for walking, cycling and wheeling'. 'Wheeling' is moving on wheels whether by wheelchair, skates, buggy or mobility aid. It is to be hoped that these temporary measures, hastily introduced, do not become permanent by default. As publicised in the photo-shoot in our newsletter of September 2021 the Council permitted the establishment of outdoor eating areas and, although we are sympathetic to the needs of the hospitality industry, again temporary should mean just that.

The Old Town was disproportionately affected by the closure of North Bridge heading north with many bus routes diverted along Chambers Street with consequent traffic build-up. Apart from a six-week period in the summer the 35 bus was not able to follow its usual route up the High Street because of road works and was diverted twice – initially along Regent Terrace and latterly along Holyrood Road. Neither of these changes was ideal for residents in the Royal Mile. In 2020 the Edinburgh Festival and the Fringe were cancelled but in 2021 a mixture of on-line and live events was on offer. A particular success was the Book Festival at Lauriston Place. The number of tourists in Edinburgh in 2021 was a good balance – more than in 2020 but less than in 2019.

The Old Town Association maintained links with other groups and agencies in 2021 including local Councillors, in particular, Councillor Joanna Mowat, the City of Edinburgh Council, the Old Town Community Council, the Cockburn Association, Edinburgh World Heritage, Edinburgh Civic Forum, and the Scottish Civic Trust. Two members of the Committee have joined other agencies on behalf of the Old Town Association – Laura Harrington is serving on the Civic Forum, and Rosemary Mann joined the short-term lets group set up by the Cockburn Association. We also liaised with MSP Angus Robertson on the ongoing issue of the ugly barriers in the High Street.

The Association has been grateful for Zoom in 2021. Most of our committee meetings have been conducted via Zoom, as was the AGM in March. Zoom enabled members of the Association to participate from outwith Edinburgh: e.g. from Glasgow and Largs. It was not possible to have gatherings due to Covid restrictions but the Association did offer a variety of talks and presentations through Zoom. These included a talk by Christina Sinclair of Edinburgh World Heritage at the AGM on her first months at EWH; a talk by Edward Duval on the controversial figure of Henry Dundas, Viscount Melville; Eric Drake's presentation on the fireworks explosion in Chessels Court in 1867; a talk by Chris Fleet on unimplemented plans for Edinburgh based on National Library maps; a talk by art historian Patricia Andrew on People and Places in the High Street based on images by David Allen; and a talk on the Galloway Hoard by David Hughson, a volunteer guide at the Museum, and Dr Martin Goldberg, Principal Curator of Medieval Archaeology and History at the Museum. 'Snowdrops, Sombreros and Shuttlecocks' was the title of a talk given by Eric Drake and Fenella Kerr on the recently installed art work in Pirrie's Close; 'Poverty and Murder in the Old Town' was a talk given by John Lowery. A further talk by Henry Sullivan on the City of Edinburgh archives was delivered via Microsoft Teams. Thanks are due to Rosemary Mann for organising Zoom and uploading some of the talks to YouTube where they can be enjoyed again.

We now come to the members of the Committee. On behalf of the members of the Association I would like to express gratitude to everyone who has served on the Committee for their commitment and hard work. Special mention is paid to Bill Cowan who has retired as Planning Secretary after 25 years. We will miss his humour at Committee meetings and his knowledge of the Old Town. We wish him all the best for the future. Rosemary Mann and Eric Drake are responsible for the three excellent thoughtful, humorous and informative newsletters produced in 2021 – Eric for the articles and Rosemary for the photo-essays. The newsletters also list ‘Places to Visit and Things to Do’: events and talks offered by other organisations in the Old Town.

The full Committee of the Old Town Association is:

Barbara Logue (Convener)
 Naomi Richardson (Vice-Convener and Events Secretary)
 Jean Fairbairn (Minutes Secretary)
 Rosemary Mann (Treasurer and Newsletter Photographer)
 Bill Cowan (Planning Secretary)
 Eric Drake (Newsletter Editor)
 Laura Harrington
 Kate Marshall
 Gavin MacDougall
 Helen McBride

The Old Town Association has benefited greatly from the talents of its committee members but would appreciate new members. If you feel able and willing to serve on the Committee please get in touch via our website (www.eota.org.uk) or by mail at c/o The Cockburn Association, Trunk’s Close, 55 High Street, Edinburgh EH1 1SR.

The financial position of the OTA at the end of August 2021 (its financial year-end) was:

Summary Accounts for year to 31.08.21	Receipts	Payments	Surplus/ (Deficit)	
Events	1,109	246	863	
Donations	218	500	(282)	
All other receipts and payments	347	976	(629)	
Total	£1,674	£1,722	(£48)	
Balances	31.08.20	Receipts	Payments	31.08.21
	£7,561	£1,674	£1,722	£7,513

With the newsletter now being produced in colour meaning higher printing costs, it was decided to increase subscriptions from September 2021.

In the year under review, our sister organisation, the Brownlee Old Town Trust, made a donation of toy musical instruments to the Cowgate Under-5s Centre. The Trust also gave a grant to Justine Gordon-Smith towards her project to document the lives of those living on the Royal Mile.

Our members deserve thanks for their loyalty and support in the difficult circumstances of 2021. For the future, all being well, we can look forward to outside walks and talks as we did before. The re-opening of North Bridge and the Netherbow junction will bring an end to months of upheaval. The Council’s programme of a Low Emission Zone (LEZ) will be progressed and we hope Spaces for People will be reassessed. 2022 will see the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the Edinburgh Festival and Fringe – we expect there will be appropriate celebrations.

Barbara Logue
 Convener