



Edinburgh Old Town Association Newsletter

April 2019

Here we go again!

In our January Newsletter the Association's Convener, Barbara Logue, wrote about transport in the Old Town in the light of proposals from the City Council. She also addresses this subject in her Convener's Report for 2018 which is enclosed with this newsletter. This is a very live issue with a flurry of proposals from the City Council and several consultation exercises scheduled for the next few months. In this newsletter we try to come to grips with what is proposed; look at areas of uncertainty and concern; and invite Association members to make their views known to their Committee.

Another subject that never goes away is the impact on the Old Town of tourism, particularly short-term lets. There have been some recent indications of shifting official policy in this area which we explore in this newsletter.

An interesting glimpse of Edinburgh just under two hundred years ago is provided by a panorama which had been languishing (and deteriorating) in store in the Central Library but which now, thanks to a grant from our Association, has been framed and put on public display. A fascinating feature of Edinburgh's more recent past is how many stars of stage and screen got their first break here. We look at a few of these in this Newsletter. Finally, this edition's photo essay looks at a way in which Edinburgh's past manifests itself in the present: "ghost" signs from old shops and businesses surviving on the modern streets.

Travel in the Old Town

There are various City of Edinburgh Council initiatives and proposals in this area. The main ones appear to be:

- The Active Travel Action Plan adopted by the Council in 2016 (as a follow-up to a plan first adopted in 2010) and aimed at increasing the levels of walking and cycling in Edinburgh.

Three projects or plans set out in the *EDINBURGH – Connecting our City, Transforming our Places* consultation document mentioned in the last newsletter:

- The City Centre Transformation Project – described as “an action plan for a vibrant and people-focussed capital city centre to improve community economic and cultural life”.
- The City Mobility Plan setting citywide transport policy and actions with the intention of giving Edinburgh “a cleaner, safer, inclusive and accessible transport system delivering a healthier, thriving and fairer capital city, and a higher quality of life for residents”

- Low Emission Zones (LEZ) projects intended as a step towards protecting Edinburgh's citizens from the harms of poor air quality. This is in line with Scottish Government priorities to introduce LEZs in Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, and Glasgow by 2020.

Additionally there are:

- The Meadows to George Street Project which aims to transform the quality of walking, cycling, accessibility for all and public spaces on some of Edinburgh's busiest streets. In our area this affects Teviot Place, Bristo Place, Forrest Road, George IV Bridge, Bank Street and the Mound.
- The Open Streets Programme which includes the vehicle-free days on the 1st Sunday of each month (10am-5pm) in parts of the city centre as mentioned in the last newsletter.
- Measures to improve public safety during the summer festivals which it is intended to roll out across Old Town this year. The measures include road closures (temporary or permanent), increasing footway widths and removing street furniture. Worryingly, council officials are reported to have acknowledged that some of the proposals could lead to a rise in noise disturbance and antisocial behaviour complaints.

Much of what is in the consultation documents is motherhood and apple pie stuff. For example, *Connecting our city, Transforming our places* talks about "creating a walkable city centre and reducing the dominance of vehicular traffic". Who could argue with that? But the devil will be in the detail. Many people are challenged by walking any distance – particularly on the setts and steep hills found in the Old Town. How are they to be catered for? What exactly does "reducing the dominance of vehicular traffic" mean? Anyone familiar with the Old Town knows that some types of vehicle are more problematic than others. Large commercial vehicles unnecessarily travelling through the area, multiple (and often substantially empty) tour buses and

inconsiderately parked delivery vans spring to mind. On the other hand, public buses are essential to many people and any move to restrict or exclude them would be unwelcome.



The Council has produced some imaginative artist's impressions of how things might look in the brave new world - such as this view of the east end of the Cowgate (as is, above, imagined below). This shows the point where the existing night-time exclusion of vehicular traffic starts. That exclusion is widely ignored. The Cowgate itself and the streets that feed into it near this point – High School Wynd, Niddry Street and Blackfriars Street – are well used access routes. Can they really be closed off? If the intention is for part-time closure (perhaps with delivery vehicles allowed in early in the morning) how long will the setts shown in the drawing survive? The drawing also suggests that pedestrians and cyclists will share the space with no segregation between them. Surely not a good idea?



The Old Town Association accepts that changes need to be made and we see merit in much of what the council is suggesting. But whatever changes are implemented must be sensitive to the needs of local people and Old Town residents in particular. To that end the forthcoming rounds of consultation will be important. Announced consultations include:

- Low Emission Zone(s) in May 2019 with final recommendations in October 2019.
- Edinburgh City Centre Transformation in May 2019 with final recommendations in August 2019.
- City Mobility Plan August 2019 with final recommendations in December 2019.
- Meadows to George Street Project with further consultation in spring/summer 2019.

The Old Town Association plans to take a full part in these consultations. It would help us to do so if members could let us know of any issues about which they are particularly interested or concerned. You can do this by speaking to any committee member (names listed in the enclosed Convener's report), by writing to the address at the top of this newsletter or by emailing info@eotaorg.uk

Tourism impact

There are encouraging indications that the potentially damaging impact of tourism on local residents is beginning to be recognised by both the City of Edinburgh Council and the Scottish Parliament and Government. In February Edinburgh councillors voted in favour of a "tourist tax", which could become the first of its kind in the UK. The new tax cannot come into effect unless the Scottish Parliament passes enabling legislation. However, the Scottish Government's agreement with the Scottish Greens allowing passage of the 2019 budget bill included an undertaking to "consult, in 2019, on the principles of a locally determined tourist tax, prior to introducing legislation to permit local authorities to introduce a transient visitor levy". It is unlikely that the enabling legislation could be introduced before 2020.

Edinburgh's transient visitor levy (TVL) proposals include a £2-per-night charge added to the price of any room for the first week of a stay. It would apply to all accommodation, including Airbnb-style short-term lets.

Other encouraging indications come from decisions on planning applications to turn

residential accommodation into holiday lets. One particularly interesting case is the Council's decision in February on a planning application to turn a residential flat on South Bridge into two self-contained holiday lets. Generally speaking, such changes require planning permission – although it is clear that many such conversions have been made throughout the Old Town without any attempt to seek permission. In this case, the property which was the subject of the application was accessed from a common stair serving other residential properties.

Planning legislation says that in making determinations on planning applications councils must have regard to the relevant local development plan and “the determination shall be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise”. For applications in the Old Town the relevant local development plan is the Edinburgh Local Plan which includes a policy on Inappropriate Uses in Residential Areas (HOU 7) which states that uses which may be materially detrimental to the living conditions of nearby residents will not be permitted. In this case the Council concluded that the proposed use would be detrimental because it “would enable individuals to arrive and stay at the premises for a short period of time on a regular basis throughout the year in a manner dissimilar to that of permanent residents. As such this allows for the potential of a very high turnover of visitors, which in turn will cause noise disturbance at unsociable hours for existing residents within the stair. This is not in keeping with the residential character of the site”. Planning permission was refused.

This decision is encouraging because it acknowledges one of the key detrimental effects of holiday lets on a residential stair. However, this is only relevant if planning permission is sought for a proposed change of use. We understand that because of resource constraints the City of Edinburgh Council does not feel able to take the initiative in identifying unauthorised changes of use and taking enforcement action against them. Instead, it will only take action in response to a complaint from a member of the public.

This is unsatisfactory. Residents might quite understandably feel that complaining about changes of use in a neighbouring property could place them in an invidious position. Surely there must be some better way of addressing this problem?

Panorama of Edinburgh

If you go to the Central Library and down two floors to the Scotland and Edinburgh Room, you can now see a fascinating view of early Victorian Edinburgh entitled *Edinburgh and the Surrounding Country as seen from the Calton Hill*. The long, narrow hand-coloured print by Lizars, dated 1841, had long been in store at the Central Library but the library lacked the funds to have it framed and brought out for public display. It seemed inevitable that it would continue to deteriorate slowly until it came to the point where it was beyond saving and had to be thrown out. However, a small grant from the Old Town Association made it possible to have the frame repaired so the print could be hung in this public space for all to see.



OTA Convener Barbara Logue (left) presents our donation to Cleo Jones, Manager of Information & Learning Resources at the City of Edinburgh Council.

The print shows a 360-degree panorama starting on the left-hand side looking north across the firth, then panning around the eastern suburbs of the city, across the Old Town and ending up on the right-hand side looking back over the Firth. The lively foreground suggests that if anything Calton Hill was a more popular place of resort than it is now. Elegant ladies and gentlemen admire the view; boys are playing football; two highland soldiers take an off-duty stroll; a couple of army officers point out landmarks

to each other; and a large group of washer-women are spreading their laundry out to dry.

A prominent feature in the print is the tall, smoke-belching chimney of the Edinburgh Coal Gas Works in the Canongate – something which features in many 19th century views of the city. The spire of the Tron Kirk is as we know it; rebuilt in 1828 following the destruction of its predecessor in the great fire of 1824. Also visible are the Burns Monument (built 1830) and the Dugald Stewart Monument (built in 1831), and the Royal High School (completed 1829). In the distance is “railway station St Leonard’s Hill”, the terminus of the Innocent Railway, which opened in 1831.



Edinburgh and the Surrounding Country as seen from the Calton Hill, Lizars, 1841 (detail).

What is not depicted is Waverley Station, which did not open until 1846. Instead you can see the cluster of buildings east of North Bridge which would later be swept away to make way for trains. The Royal Institution building (built 1822-26 and extended 1831-36) can be seen on the “Earthen Mound”, but not the National Gallery, the foundation stone of which would not be laid until 1850. Instead you can see the Rotunda, which housed dioramas, a popular attraction at the time. The top of the Mound is not yet adorned with the spire of the Tolbooth Kirk (completed 1844 and combining use as a church with the assembly hall for the Church of Scotland) or the twin towers of New College (completed 1850 for the Free Church, formed following the Disruption of 1843).

Also not in the view is the Political Martyrs' Monument in Old Calton Burial Ground. This 27 metre high obelisk was proposed in 1837 but not completed until 1844. The Melville Monument, though, is not only in the print, but is listed in the margin as a significant feature. Henry Dundas, 1st Viscount Melville, whose nicknames were 'King Harry the Ninth', the 'Great Tyrant' and the 'Uncrowned King of Scotland', was in power in the 1790s when Thomas Muir, William Skirving and others were transported for campaigning for parliamentary reform. It is noteworthy that the Melville monument was funded by a levy on the pay of the officers and men of the navy and marines (described as "voluntary contributions") whereas the Martyrs' monument was funded by public subscription. Not only is the martyrs' obelisk higher than Melville's pillar, but it is far more prominent ... and rightly so.

As an object of beauty and historical interest *Edinburgh and the Surrounding Country* is well worth a look next time you are in the Central Library.

You saw them first...

The work on the Calton Hill panorama is a good example of how modest donations from your Association can preserve pieces of Old Town heritage. Another is restoration work on *Picturesque Bits of Old Edinburgh*, a book of Victorian photographs held by the National Library of Scotland. Association members who went on a behind the scenes tour of the library in January were able to see the restored volume as well as other fascinating material.

This included a selection of flyers, playbills and so on from past Fringe Festivals. Some of these showed well-known stage and screen actors early in their careers. One programme had Miriam Margolyes half-way down the bill and John Cleese among the extras whose names were squeezed in, in small print at the bottom of the page. Maggie Smith appeared at Riddle's Court in 1953 early in her career. There are many other such examples. Do any of our readers have memories of seeing future stars starting out in Edinburgh at the Fringe or

elsewhere? If so, we'd love to hear about them and perhaps feature them in a future newsletter.

The National Library of Scotland requests this material from the production companies. The Central Library does not have the resources to collect such ephemera and relies on members of the public to hand in leaflets, flyers, playbills and programmes. So, if you accumulate a bundle of printed paper over the summer, and during the Festival in particular, don't recycle it, but hand it into the desk in the Edinburgh and Scotland Room. Who knows, your modest contribution might just contain evidence of the first appearance of a star of the future!

Dressing-up Time!

Young visitors to the Museum of Childhood can now dress up as their favourite fairy tale character or as a wolf, pig or bear thanks to the Brownlee Old Town Trust. Dressing-up costumes have a hard time at the Museum and their old stock was far gone. A happy time on the Internet and £330 later and the dressing-up corner is now a colourful and sparkly jumble of capes, caps and hats ... not to mention a choice of tiaras. Another example of a modest donation having a big impact.

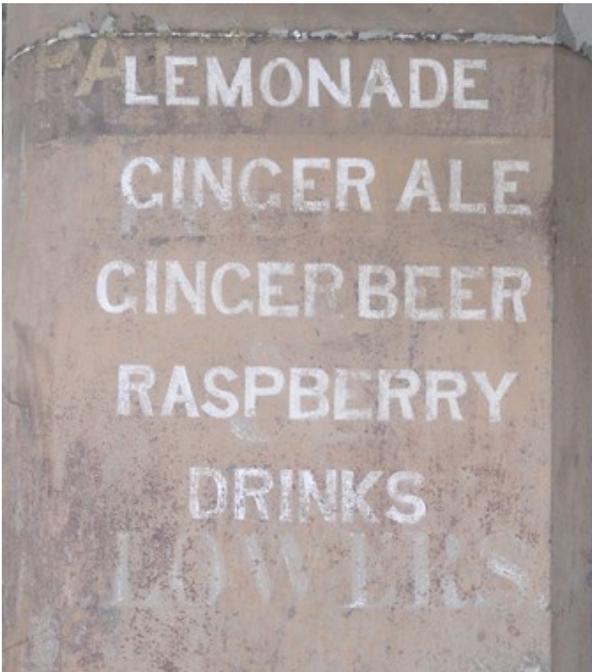


Some of the dressing-up costumes purchased for the Museum of Childhood.

Less glamorous, but just as useful, a set of sturdy bookends has been donated by the Brownlee Trust to support (literally) the collection of children's books held by the Museum of Childhood and stored in the City Archives.

Ghost Signs

Some 'ghost' signs of former businesses in the Old Town. Soft drinks in Upper Bow:



Offices in George IV Bridge:



Sale rooms and cleaners in St Mary's Street:



Hats in South Bridge and furniture sale rooms in Candlemaker Row:



Wireworks in Old Assembly Close:



Events and Happenings

The **Costume Society Scotland** holds regular lectures in Augustine United Church, 41 George IV Bridge. The talk on Monday 1 April is *Tales of the Old Department Stores of Edinburgh* by Jane Tulloch. Lectures start at 7.30 pm (tea/coffee from 7.00 pm, charge for non-members). See <http://www.costumesocietyscotland.co.uk/whats-on/4590053735> for other lectures.

For talks and events at the **National Library of Scotland** and **Edinburgh Central Library** see www.nls.uk/events and www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/edinburgh-reads-1650684470 respectively. There are currently two exhibitions at the National Library. *A Better World? Scotland after the First World War* runs until 27 April and explores the impact of the First World War on post-war Scotland.

The Rhind Lectures 2019 will be given by Professor David Breeze OBE on the topic of *Hadrian's Wall: A Study in Archaeological Exploration and Interpretation*. Six lectures running from the evening of Friday 10 May to the afternoon of Sunday 12 in the auditorium of the National Museum of Scotland. Tickets (free) from the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

The current exhibition at the **Queen's Gallery** at the Palace of Holyrood House (running until 2 June 2019) is *Charles II: Art and Power*. Old master paintings and spectacular silver furniture show the rich material world of Charles II's court and the role of the arts in the re-establishment of the Stuart monarchy. The next main exhibition, running between 21 June and 3 November, will be *Russia, Royalty and the Romanovs*, telling the story of the familial, political, diplomatic and artistic associations between Britain and Russia and their royal families from the late 17th century through to Russia's last emperor Nicholas II and beyond. Between 14 June and 6 October there will be an exhibition *A Royal Wedding: the Duke and Duchess of Sussex*. 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.

Information about current exhibitions at the **City Arts Centre** in Market Street can be found at <https://www.edinburghmuseums.org.uk/whats-on>. *In Focus: Scottish Photography* showcases the City Art Centre's photographic collections, charting the development of fine art photography in Scotland from the 19th century to the present day. Between 18 May and 13 October the Centre will have an exhibition of the work of *Victoria Crowe* featuring over 150 works by this distinguished living artist, including landscapes produced in the Pentland Hills.

The **Museum of Childhood** has an exhibition on *Bringing up Baby* and **The Writers' Museum** a display of *Storyworlds: Paper Sculptures by Edinburgh Young Artists* (until 12 May).

The current major temporary exhibition at the **National Museum of Scotland** in Chambers Street, starting on 18 January and running until 5 May, is *Robots*. Featuring more than 100 objects, from early automata to science fiction film stars, this will be a chance to see the most significant collection of humanoid robots ever assembled. This will be followed by *Wild and Majestic*, which considers the origins of dramatic highland landscapes, heroic histories, tartan and bagpipes as the defining images of Scotland for many people around the world today. Entry charges apply. Until 21 April (and free) *Embroidered Stories: Scottish Samplers* has 70 examples of exquisite needlework created across Scotland in the 18th and 19th centuries by young girls (and one boy). Also at the National Museum, the new galleries devoted to *Egypt*, *East Asia* (China, Korea and Japan) and *The Art of Ceramics* are now open.

The Dovecot Studio in Infirmary Street has an exhibition *Orla Kiely: A Life in Pattern*. Orla Kiely is celebrated for her plant-based patterns that pack a powerful graphic punch on everyday life. Entry charges apply.

OTA Activities

History of Printing Walk. Thursday 25 April, 6.30 p.m. Helen Williams of The Scottish Printing Archival Trust will lead a walking tour exploring some of the printing- and publishing-related sites near the High Street in Edinburgh's Old Town. Tickets £6. Numbers limited, **members only**.

Convivialia! Monday 13 May, 7.00 p.m. Historian Graeme Cruickshank will give us tales of the tavern-based social clubs which flourished in Edinburgh's Old Town in the 18th century, with a look at some of the historic tavern-names on the Royal Mile. Tickets £6. Guests welcome.

Under the North Bridge. Thursday 20 June, 6.30 p.m. Just what is going on under North Bridge? Come and hear a representative of contractors Balfour Beatty talk about the activity underway on the scaffolding access decks over Market Street and the railway tracks. After the talk, there might be a possibility for a small number of members to make a site visit (weather and work dependent). Tickets £5. Guests welcome at the talk.

Walk Around Castle Rock. Tuesday 2 July, 10.00 a.m. Edinburgh Castle Rock developed as part of a volcano hundreds of millions of years before human occupation. Today it provides a spectacular backdrop to the centre of the City of Edinburgh. Andrew McMillan, author of the leaflet *Around Castle Rock* for the Edinburgh Geological Society, will lead a walk to show the results of the geological processes which created the landscape of the city centre and a selection of stone-constructed buildings and monuments which form part of the city's built heritage. Tickets £6. Numbers limited, **members only**.



When we say members only, we mean it!

Please do not ask for tickets for friends or partners unless they are also members.

How to Book Tickets

The Old Town Association uses on-line banking and 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** using the enclosed ticket form. The address for ticket applications and subscriptions is: 11/9 Dalziel Place, Edinburgh EH7 5TR. Please remember to enclose a stamped addressed envelope for your tickets!
- **On-line.** Send an email to info@eota.org.uk to say which tickets you wish to purchase. Then, pay using our bank details (shown on the ticket form), or through the OTA PayPal account (click the Donate button link at www.eota.org.uk/index.php/what-we-do/join-us), or buy your ticket through Eventbrite (booking fee applies).

You may also use bank transfer or 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) so we know what your payment is for!