



# Edinburgh Old Town Association

## CONVENER'S REPORT 2010

I have been convener of Edinburgh Old Town Association since March 2010, but my connection with the Association is a much more long-standing one. I served as Secretary in the early years of the Association and then as a Committee member. Since then, as an ordinary member of the Association, I have always taken a keen interest in its work and activities. I am aware that some of the same concerns of all these years ago are still relevant to the Old Town now.

Over the years the importance of balance in the Old Town has been, and continues to be, crucial. There has to be balance between the provision of pubs and, now, cafés and restaurants, and local shops; balance between tat shops and quality shops; balance between the demands of the evening economy and the needs of local people; and balance between the amenity of residents and the claims of the Fringe, the Festival and the Tattoo. The proliferation of shops in the Old Town selling cheap tartan goods and the consequent deterioration of shop standards with unsightly shop fronts and obstructed pavements have been noticeable in recent years. In its newsletters the Old Town Association has publicised this important issue and indicated the difficulties in enforcing standards. We have worked with local Councillors, the City Centre Neighbourhood Partnership and the police on this and other major concerns. As every year, we have considered all Old Town planning applications and made comments when appropriate. Uniquely, Edinburgh's Old Town is a place for living, working and playing and the Old Town Association is committed to striving to maintain this situation.

There are issues in the Old Town that are still unresolved. The Caltongate scheme is stalled but the proposed Advocate's Close project may go ahead. As mentioned in our September newsletter consent is being sought for development of a large brewery site at Sugarhouse Close in the Canongate. Of concern is the University of Edinburgh Moray House project to develop student housing which will involve demolition of existing buildings and affect the skyline. The Association firmly encourages development because we have no wish to have empty spaces or deteriorating buildings in the Old Town. Any development, though, must be commensurate with the importance of Edinburgh Old Town as part of a World Heritage Site.

The Association worked, as usual, with other amenity and local organisations. Representatives attend meetings of the Old Town Community Council, the City Centre Neighbourhood Partnership, Edinburgh World Heritage and Edinburgh Civic Forum. We have contributed our views to the City of Edinburgh's Budget Consultation process and to the Draft Management Plan for the Old and New Towns of Edinburgh World Heritage Site.

Our newsletters, edited by Robin Tait, which come out three times a year, offer opinions, articles and information for members. The newsletters, thanks to Robin, are thoughtful, provoking but never dull. We have three meetings a year for members to discuss policies or matters of concern. In 2010 we had a talk from Sorina Spanou of Headland Archaeology on the finds unearthed during tram works and a talk by Lyall Downie, our local Community Police Officer for the Old Town. The programme of other activities arranged by Naomi Richardson has been stimulating, diverse and well-attended. These included a Patrick Geddes Gardens Walk, a visit to Calton Hill and its monuments, Our Poetic Royal Mile, the NLS Map Library, King David's Tower in the Castle, Strictly Come Swimming, the Value of Space and a visit to Calton Hill Observatory House. Edinburgh on Film and talks on the St James Centre and Historic Shopfronts were organised by the OTA but run in conjunction with the Cockburn Association, a successful partnership which allows us to hold bigger events and also gain new members.

The excellent work of Robin Tait (Newsletter Editor) and Naomi Richardson (Activities Organiser) have already been mentioned and on a personal level and on behalf of the members of the OTA I would like to thank them and the other members of the Committee for their commitment and hard work. Rose Mackenzie as Secretary, Rosemary Mann as Treasurer, Bill Cowan as Planning Officer, Eleanor Peat as Membership Secretary have been very efficient and reliable. To them and to Anja Amsel, Eric Drake, and Martyn Lambourne, Jolin Warren and in particular Roma Crampin, my predecessor as Convener, I am grateful for their support and patience towards me in my new role as Convener. Thanks are due too to members of the Committee who have resigned over the year – Jean Fairbairn, Jane Yeoman and Willie Drysdale. We would welcome new Committee members so if you might be interested please get in touch!

The current membership of the OTA is 291, an increase on last year, and our finances remain healthy. The Brownlee Trust continues to support projects for young people in the Old Town. Our new improved website – [eota.org.uk](http://eota.org.uk) – can provide much more information. We are grateful to Rosemary Mann for her part in updating the website.

Finally there has been positive news about Edinburgh this year for which the Old Town must claim its share of credit. Edinburgh was voted the UK's top city for tourists, Simon Callow named Edinburgh as his favourite destination and the film 'L'Ilusioniste' depicted Edinburgh in a thoughtful, if slightly eccentric way. The Old Town's 'The Scottish Grocer' at the corner of Jeffrey Street and the Canongate was given an award at the Scottish Independent Retail Awards. The coverage of the Pope's visit to Edinburgh showed the beauty of our city. The backdrop of Arthur's Seat to the celebrations was stunning – thanks to the lovely weather!

Whatever the weather and whatever the situation – the day-to-day and humdrum or the grand occasion – the Old Town Association has continued, and still continues, to work for the area of the Old Town throughout the year.

Barbara Logue  
Convener