



Edinburgh Old Town Association

Convener's Report 2016

Another year has gone by and it seems that the Old Town is busier than ever with visitors and tourists and not just during the Festival or the New Year celebrations but throughout the year. The Old Town is becoming more popular with visitors according to recent statistics with the National Museum in Chambers Street being the most popular visitor attraction in Scotland; 1.81 million people went there in 2016. Edinburgh Castle and St Giles Cathedral also attracted over 1 million visitors each. There are now even more hotels in the Old Town area, like the Adagio Aparthotel in the Canongate and the Premier Inn in Market Street, with potentially more to come in the Kings Stables Road and India Buildings developments. We are already aware of the growth in student housing and now the expansion of Airbnb with its lack of regulation has begun to impinge on the Old Town. As I wrote in my report last year we must continue to be aware of the growing imbalance between the population of local residents and even more transient groups of tourists, students and Airbnb visitors.

Forty years of the Old Town Association was celebrated by looking back to history and forward to the future. We contributed £560 as the first instalment towards digitisation of the first set of catalogue cards of the Boog Watson Archive in the Central Library. The research into the history and topography of Edinburgh by Charles Boog Watson comprises 14 volumes and it is being digitised in a joint project between Edinburgh City Libraries and the National Library of Scotland. It is hoped that the OTA donation will help to start the ball rolling.

There have been other positive outcomes in 2016. The Old Town was spared the Street of Light this Christmas. The Association wrote to Councillors expressing concerns about the lack of consultation, the proximity of the construction to local houses and the fact it was inappropriate for a World Heritage site. Individuals will have different views about the Street of Light as a spectacle but we felt the High Street was not the right place for it. The renovation of 19 of the East Market Street Arches has provided accommodation for art galleries, cafes and artisan shops. There was debate about the commercial development of the Arches but the street has been enlivened. At the beginning of the year the OTA received an email from the Old Town Association in Tallinn, Estonia inquiring about mutual problems like parking and the decline in the number of Old Town residents. We have kept up the link and hopefully it may be useful in the future. After a number of weeks and a number of polite but persistent emails the Tron Clock is working again.

The Association continued to have links with the Old Town Community Council, Edinburgh World Heritage, the Civic Forum, Cowgate Under5s' Centre, the City of Edinburgh Council, the Old Town Development Trust, local Councillors and MSPs. Topics for discussion with these bodies ranged from Airbnb, the 12 Closes Project initiated by EWH, the progress of the New Waverley development, busking including amplified busking, the proposed community facility in Cranston Street, graffiti on the former Calton Studios building in Calton Road and the possibility of a taxi rank being reintroduced into Waverley Station. Representatives from the OTA attended conferences (the Scottish Civic Trust in Linlithgow), exhibitions (the New Waverley development at Old St Paul's), a site visit to Riddles Court and the work in progress, and a presentation on the Walking in the Old Town Project. Surveys and questionnaires on Heritage Volunteering, the future of the library services and the Scottish Civic Trust were completed on behalf of the OTA. Thanks are due to our Councillors, in particular Joanna Mowat, and our MSPs, in particular Miles Briggs.

The diverse activities of the Old Town Association could not be undertaken without the commitment and hard work of the members of the Committee. As before, Bill Cowan, our Planning Secretary, has dealt assiduously with the many and varied planning applications submitted to the City of Edinburgh Council ranging from the vast and controversial proposal for India Buildings to the installation of cash machines. Eric Drake and Rosemary Mann are responsible for our thrice-yearly newsletters, Eric as editor and Rosemary as photographer and page-setter. The newsletters are informative and thought-provoking and the photographic sections are interesting and eclectic. We are grateful to Naomi Richardson, our Activities Secretary, for once again producing a diverse and interesting programme of events for members. Activities included visits to the Magdalen Chapel in the Cowgate, the Incorporated Trades of Edinburgh in Melville Street and the Edinburgh Gin Distillery and guided tours round the Canongate Breweries, the recently re-opened galleries of the National Museum and of the Canongate Kirkyard with tales of some of the characters buried there. At Christmas there was a successful Christmas party including poetry reading appropriately at the Scottish Poetry Library. Other members of the Committee are Jean Fairbairn as Minutes Secretary, Roma Crampin as Membership Secretary, Rosemary Mann in her other role as Treasurer, Katie Kerr, Laura Harrington and Anja Amsel our Honorary President. All of the Committee members give their time to the OTA on a voluntary basis and I would like to express our sincere thanks to them on behalf of our membership. We would welcome new members to the Committee – our meetings are monthly, so if you are interested and feel willing to have a go please get in touch.

Financially, the OTA continues on a sound basis:

Summary Accounts for year to 31.08.16		Receipts	Payments	Surplus/ (Deficit)
Events		1,009	879	130
Donations made			560	(560)
All other receipts and payments		1,081	814	267
Total		£2,090	£2,253	(£163)
Balances	31.08.15	Receipts	Payments	31.08.16
	£6,617	£2,090	£2,253	£6,454

Current membership of the Association is 203 individual members and 11 corporate members. Membership is open to people who live in, work in or just have an interest in or affection for the Old Town. In fact the proportion of members who actually live in the Old Town is about one-third. We made an effort this year to recruit new members by delivering a one page newsletter in the Old Town area outlining the work of the OTA and encouraging people to join but with patchy results. The annual subscription is very reasonable and I am sure our current membership would agree that the OTA is good value for money. We appreciated the loyalty of members and their input and support at the two members' meetings and the AGM where they had opportunities to express their views and raise issues. We would encourage people to visit the OTA website www.eota.org.uk to get information about newsletters, activities, and links to other relevant websites and brief reports on committee meetings.

In the future the OTA will continue to represent its members on issues that affect the Old Town, continue to inform them through newsletters and meetings and continue to inspire, educate and entertain with our range of visits, talks and guided walks.

Barbara Logue
Convener