



Newsletter

June 2025

From the Editor – Olwyn Alexander

Welcome to the June 2025 newsletter. A reminder of the programme of walks led by active guides for 2025.

Tuesday 3rd June 10.30am – *Memorials and Monuments on Calton Hill*. Meet at the Duke of Wellington statue in front of General Register House. Graham Sutherland

Thursday 12th June 6.00pm, an evening walk – *The historic area of Broughton*. Meet at the Sherlock Holmes statue in Picardy Place, finishing point Canonmills. Jim Eunson

Tuesday 17th June 6.00pm, an evening walk – *Gaels in Edinburgh*. Meet at Old Stamp Office Close. John Masson

Thursday 26th June 10.00am – *Grassmarket*. Meet at the old well at the foot of the West Bow. Eric Melvin

Custom Tours for (IATEFL)

The Edinburgh International Conference Centre (EICC) played host to the the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL) 2025 conference, hosting over 2,500 speakers and delegates. EFVGA was asked to organize late afternoon tours for delegates on the 9th and 10th April with an information session on 8th. There was considerable interest in the information session and we were moved to a larger lecture theatre to accommodate the audience.

Eric Melvin gave a well-illustrated whistlestop tour of both Old and New Towns to a rapt audience followed by John Masson, who introduced this group of language teachers to Scots Gaelic, showing some common words, *smashin* and *brogue*, are derived from Gaelic. Questions afterwards for John and Victor Aitken focused on differences between Irish and Scots Gaelic and the Doric.

Elsbeth McLean was on hand to take advance bookings and to register people on the following evenings. In the event

90 people took a tour of the Old or New Towns (or both) over the two evenings, led by 13 volunteer guides.

Fiona Watt commented that she "enjoyed being with this lovely international group of teachers, who were lively and engaged and asked lots of questions".



The tours received some very nice five-star TripAdvisor reviews:

"John guided us around Edinburgh New Town. He brought history to life, concentrating on people who did

great things in the course of time. We had a fantastic experience."

"Our guide, Victor did a fantastic job. We got to hear many entertaining, thought provoking, and - maybe most importantly - historically accurate stories about Edinburgh and its inhabitants."

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Visit to The Kings Bodyguard For Scotland The Royal Company of Archers

Huge thanks to Val Baker for securing a visit by fourteen guides on 6th May to Archers Hall, a building in Buccleuch Street that many people pass by without realizing its significance. It is very rare to gain entry to this modest eighteenth century building, which opens out like the Tardis to reveal sumptuous banqueting and reception halls, a sheltered garden and an archery practice hall.

We were greeted by Brigadier Colonel Charlie Wallace for a comprehensive tour and a history of the Company. His rather unusual rank combines his former Army rank (Colonel) with his current rank within the Royal Company (Brigadier) as it is organized along quasi-military lines. Charlie is the Secretary for the Council of the Royal Company, which consists of nine members and the President.

It was founded in 1676 as a private members club to improve the practice of archery in support of the interests of the restored King Charles II. It received its Royal Charter from Queen Anne in 1704. It is the only exponent of longbow archery remaining in Scotland and currently has 618 members dispersed worldwide. These can be recalled for bodyguard duties, for example, 400 returned for the lying at rest in St Giles and lying in state at Westminster of Queen Elizabeth II and the announcement of the new King Charles.

The Royal Charter requires the Company to make a reddendo – a gift – to the reigning monarch, and one of these, displayed in the entrance hall, was a gift of a pair of arrows. There were actually three arrows resting on a monogrammed cushion and the Brigadier teased us to think of the reason a pair consisted of three.

The building dates from 1776, when it was decided that shooting on the meadows was too cold and repairing to a pub afterwards too expensive so the club needed its own premises. Several sympathetic extensions and renovations have taken place in the last century. We were welcomed in the small hall and proceeded upstairs to a splendid banqueting hall lined with portraits of some of the former presidents.

The most recent one of Queen Elizabeth II on her 90th birthday, painted by a Welsh artist, Nicky Phillips, was in pride of place. It was flanked by portraits by David Martin and his pupil Henry



Raeburn. We heard the tale of William St Clair of Roslin who is shown in golfing attire, swinging a club. Originally this portrait was commissioned by the Royal Company of Golfers but when they fell on hard times the

painting was sold to the Archers in 1770s. The golfers would like it back but the price is a bit too high. It is a very famous golfing image.

The company has the oldest trophy still competed for, the Musselburgh Arrow dating from 1603. Other notable relics are a longbow used at the Battle of Flodden and an example of the tartan uniform designed for the visit of George IV in 1822, along with the colours (the flag) gifted by the King on that visit. Sir Walter Scott, who masterminded the King's visit, was a member of the Royal Company. New colours have been commissioned with the approval of the King and the Lord Lyon and will be embroidered in Scotland.

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The final part of the tour took us to a smaller reception hall and downstairs to the shooting gallery, which opens out onto a lovely private lawn which can be used for Royal receptions.



The gallery is long enough to accommodate arrows shot over 180 yards. Normal practice is to shoot two arrows in each round but at such a distance arrows can fall short and break so a replacement

arrow is often needed before the end of a shoot – hence the reddendo we saw at the start of a 'pair' of arrows comprising a pair and a spare.

Throughout the tour the Brigadier was keen to emphasise the immense respect and loyalty the Company has for the Sovereign, to the extent that any members who may have been for Prince Charlie in 1745 left the Company at that time. It receives no money from the State to carry out its duties but is completely self-funding and conducts charitable outreach programmes to encourage inclusion in sports for those with disabilities.

Thanks to Jim Eunson and Graham Sutherland for the images illustrating this article.

Spotlight on guides

George Laing became an Edinburgh Festival Voluntary Guide in 2005. He served as Secretary on the committee and also wrote and edited the newsletter from 2008 to 2017 (as part of his duties as Secretary). His newsletters are available in the guides area of the website.

What prompted you to become a guide?

After I retired in 1996, I wanted to do something completely different from the world of financial services. I remember being intrigued to learn at primary school that Princes Street Gardens had once been the Nor' Loch and this ignited my interest in the history of Edinburgh. I started guiding on the Guide Friday open-top buses but found the unpredictability of the traffic annoying. A bus might be held up at a point where there was little to talk about, whereas it might speed past points of greater interest. With a walking tour you're in charge of when to stop and for how long.

Have any amusing incidents occurred on your tours?

When tours were run from Cannonball House, guides would go outside to tout for business. I often wear a kilt on my tours and one day some French ladies were determined to find out what we wore under our kilts. Umbrella handles were put to good use as hooks. It was all good fun.

What period of history do you most enjoy talking about?

I enjoy the medical and surgical developments of the 19th century – Liston and Syme for example – as well as the history of the 16th – 18th centuries. One of the most fascinating buildings, which captures this earlier period is the Old Tolbooth, which was demolished in 1817. When she returned from France in 1561 as Queen of Scots, Mary Stuart wanted it rebuilt but the Town Council couldn't afford this. At that time, the building was a prison and housed the Council, the law courts and Parliament.

In 1562-63, the three western bays of St Giles were commandeered as the Outer Tolbooth. The council, the law courts and Parliament moved there, which left the Old Tollbooth as a prison. In 1564 the Council moved to the New Tolbooth, on

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the site of the Signet Library and in 1639, Parliament and the law courts moved into Parliament Hall. In 1707, Parliament moved to Westminster Parliament, and the law courts retained sole occupation of Parliament Hall. Finally in 1811 the council moved into the Royal Exchange.

Who's your favourite Royal Mile or Edinburgh character?

My favourite has to be Mary Stuart. She was a strong character who had spent her childhood in France but on coming back to Scotland she had to deal with all the opposition from political and religious factions. She was raised a Catholic but was willing to allow people to worship as they wished. However, the hardline Knoxes of this world were unhappy with her Catholic faith. You can trace her tragic story through to her 19 years imprisonment in England and subsequent execution at Fotheringhay Castle in 1587.

What have you found most rewarding about EFVGA?

Most rewarding is when customers really enjoy your tour and say they learned a lot from you. Of course, it is unsatisfying when people seem uninterested and you wonder why they joined the tour. If someone challenges your story you have to be absolutely sure of your facts.

What advice would you give new guides?

Read the starter notes from Festival Guides and do your own research. Don't try and learn it all at once. Take people (friends and family) on a tour and tell them what you know. After that you will want to go back and research some more to extend your knowledge. You do get questions you can't answer and this prompts you to do more research.

The Executive Committee is looking to recruit new members. To note interest contact info@edinburghfestivalguides.org

Image teaser



The house with the two ornamental features at each end is located on Redford Road near the entrance to Dreghorn Barracks. It was once the stable block for the adjoining 17th

century Redford House.

These carved features were rescued from the demolition of the old Royal Infirmary in Infirmary Street in 1884. This photo shows the central portion of the building, designed by William Adam, with these Drummond Scrolls in place. They were named after Provost George Drummond whose great undertaking was the erection of the Royal Infirmary in 1738, during the time of King George II.

Thanks to Jim Eunson and Pippy Tyler of the Broughton Historical Society for permission to use the text and images.

The next challenge



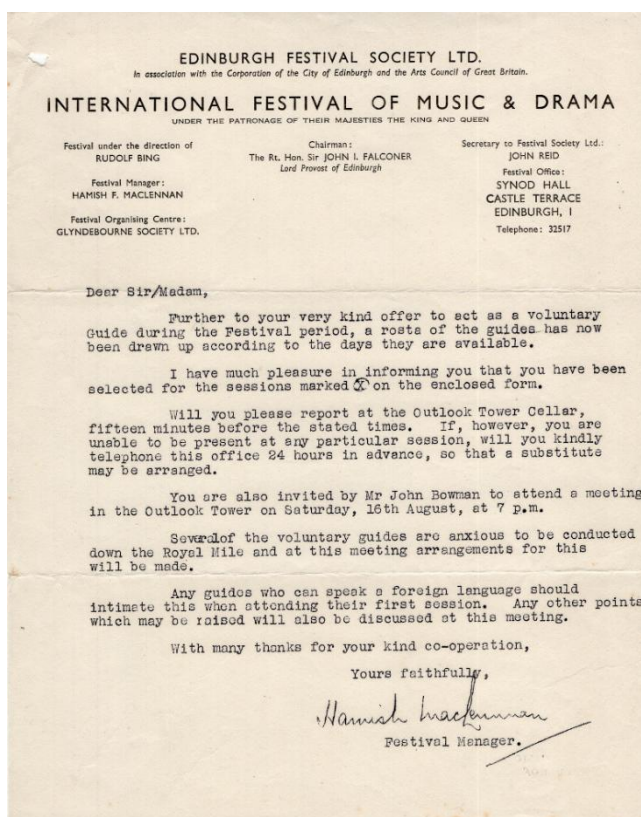
The light-fingered burghers of which Edinburgh neighbourhood transferred these stones to their current resting place. Where are they now, where were they originally and how did they come to this location?

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From the Archive

Jim Eunson has found a duplicate copy of an original letter from the archive.

As you will know the EFVGA was founded as part of the Festival in 1947 to show visiting performers around the Old Town of Edinburgh. Original documents that relate to the EFVGA in those early days are remarkably elusive, possibly because the EFVGA was only formally constituted later in 1947, holding its first AGM in 1948. Documents held either by the Festival Society or the City of Edinburgh Council may not have been preserved.



Although this letter is undated, it has Lord Provost Falconer as the Chairman and since he presided only over the first Festival, the letter must date from 1947. The letter appears to be addressed to those guides who have responded to an initial call to provide tours as it opens with "Further to your very kind offer to

act as a voluntary Guide during the Festival period" and refers recipients to a list of sessions they have been allocated on an enclosed form. It mentions John Bowman who was in charge at the start.

There are a couple of points of interest.

The letter refers to a meeting to be held on the evening of 16 August (in 1947 a Saturday) when arrangements will be made for guides who "are anxious to be conducted down the Royal Mile" – presumably for a training run. The Festival started on 22 August (the following Friday) It thus seems remarkably last-minute to suggest that this training would only be arranged on the Saturday evening before it all starts off on the following Friday. The same could be said for the request that anyone who has a foreign language should inform John Bowman then. It is also interesting to see that the original starting-point was not Cannonball House but the 'Outlook Tower Cellar'.



An image by Gerti Deutsch from Picture Post, showing contralto Kathleen Ferrier and English tenor Peter Pears on a hillside overlooking Edinburgh while visiting for the very first Festival in 1947.

Retrieved from [21 photos of the Edinburgh Fringe from its beginnings in 1947 to present day - Daily Record](#)

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The music scene in 18th century Edinburgh

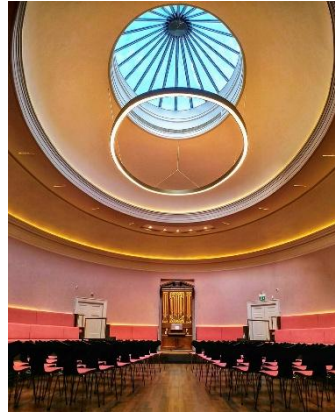
The Edinburgh International Festival of Music and Drama – as it was styled at its inception in 1947 – is a foundational event for the Edinburgh Festival Voluntary Guides Association (EFVGA), as Jim Eunson's article shows. Perhaps you are aware that there were other festivals held before this time, notably in 1815, but rather than isolated events, these sprang from a lively musical tradition in the city in the eighteenth century.

Although the powerful reformed church disapproved of elaborate music for public entertainment, folk songs and singing were popular with ordinary people. Street hawkers sold ballads with the texts and an indication of which tunes to use. If you could read Scots and knew the tunes you could sing the songs. It was common practice to write new texts for old tunes so when Allan Ramsay (Snr) published four volumes of poems in his *Tea Table Miscellany* (1723), he selected tunes in common circulation in the city. Ramsay's competitor, William Thompson, published *Orpheus Caledonius* in 1729, plagiarising Ramsay's *Miscellany* but filling a gap in the market by providing the musical scores.

The earliest public concerts may have been in the 1690s celebrating St Cecilia, the patron saint of music, and held in St Mary's Chapel in Niddry's Wynd (now demolished). A Musick Club was established around 1700 consisting chiefly of aristocrats, such as Sir John Clerk of Penicuik, who had travelled to Europe on The Grand Tour and returned home with the idea of improving society through music. He recognized the social value of being able to play the harpsichord and took lessons while he was in Rome from the celebrated composer Arcangelo Corelli.

The Edinburgh Musical Society (EMS) was formed in 1728 with a subscription fee and a closed membership of 70 to 80 aristocrats, lawyers, merchants and soldiers. Professional musicians were hired to play together with the members. Women were not permitted to join but could attend some concerts. By the mid-eighteenth century the club had expanded, recruiting more professional musicians and paying to purchase or commission music. Membership was

expanded to raise funds to build Saint Cecilia's Hall in Niddry's Wynd, which opened in 1762. It was then possible to put on grander entertainment.



In 1771, the EMS recruited Italian musicians Francesca Corri and her husband Domenico. She was the better performer, praised for blending Scottish tunes with European style. Domenico's two brothers joined the

family in Edinburgh, where they embarked on careers as impresarios, also opening a publishing house and a music shop in North Bridge. When Domenico moved his family to London in 1798, his youngest brother Natale remained in Edinburgh and built his own music venue, Corri's Rooms at Broughton street. He gave a series of subscription concerts and booked the celebrated Polish-Lithuanian violinist Felix Yaniewicz to come and perform a benefit concert in 1804.

However, the music scene in Edinburgh was threatened by a rival, Pietro Urbani, who came to Scotland in 1781. He saw Edinburgh not as a community that worked together to promote music but as a market where competitors could exist. He set up a rival series of concerts in the New Town Assembly Rooms and established his own publishing company and music shop. The Edinburgh population was not large enough to sustain this amount of musical activity. The EMS ceased its activities in 1797 while the glamour of Corri's Rooms declined.

Nevertheless, the foundation for the 1815 Festival had been established. Corri's Rooms were refitted at the expense of Festival Directors and Natale Corri (piano-forte) and Felix Yaniewicz (leader/violin) took prominent roles in the concerts.

Sources: *Thomas Sanderson's Account of Incidents: The Edinburgh Music Society 1727-1801* by Martin Hillman (2017); *Music in Edinburgh* from a talk to OEC by Brianna Robertson-Kirkland (March 2025)