



# Newsletter

November 2018

## Visitor numbers down again

Despite strenuous efforts to improve our marketing, our visitor numbers have unfortunately continued to decline. We welcomed just 559 visitors during the 2018 guiding season. That's 12% fewer than in 2017, with a cumulative decline of nearly 50% over the last five years.

The number of tours also fell: 98 this year compared to 121 in 2017. Most frustratingly, there were 43 cases of guides having to go home without a tour.

These figures are especially disappointing in view of the undisputed quality of our offering. Many guides said they continued to have very appreciative audiences and, as usual, we received a lot of excellent feedback and reviews. And we continue to enjoy a solid five-star rating on TripAdvisor.

### Competition

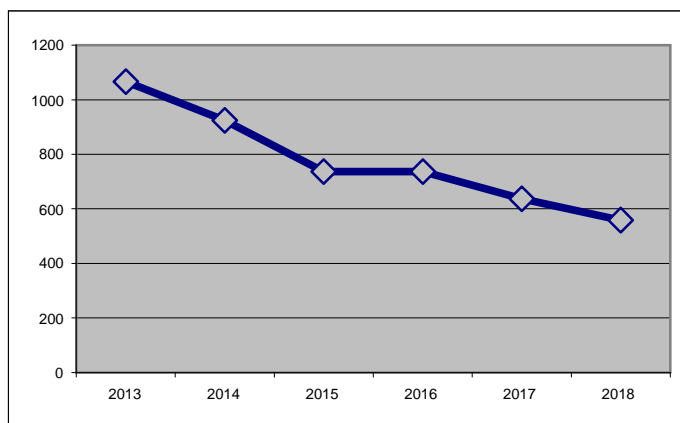
The main reason for the declining numbers is undoubtedly the increased competition. This year's Fringe brochure listed no fewer than 23 organisations offering some form of walking tour in and around the Old Town.

Another factor might be the marked increase in noise and crowds on the Royal Mile, making a walking tour more difficult and less attractive than before.

### Start times

On a more positive note, the change in our tours' start times proved very successful. Most guides said that they greatly preferred the tours starting at a fixed time rather than at intervals during half-hour slots. This also enabled us to better organise our customers into groups, and meant less hanging around for those guides who didn't get a tour.

Our new distinctive jackets and umbrellas were also popular with the guides and did a lot to improve our visibility at the City Chambers.



Our chart illustrates the trend in visitor numbers since 2013.

### A change of direction?

Given the continuing fall in our numbers, is it time for a change of direction? Should we be shifting our focus away from the Royal Mile – or from the Festival – in favour of other times or other places? Is the service we have been offering since 1947 still appropriate in 2018? Or are there better ways of using our guides' skills, knowledge and enthusiasm for the benefit of our visitors?

To discuss these questions, we are planning an informal meeting in November, to which all guides are invited. It will take place at 2.30 pm on Sunday 25th November, at the Braid Bowling Club in Morningside.

If you haven't already done so, please let Eric Melvin\* know if you plan to attend.



\*For all contact details, see the box on page 4.

# Newsletter

## GUIDE NEWS

Two new guides have recently joined our ranks. **Frances McDevitt** (right) is an Edinburgh native who can trace her family's roots in the city back to 1861. A former geography teacher, she currently volunteers at the Victorian School-room and the Bethany Night Shelters. She is an organist at St John's Church, Portobello, and a member of the Edinburgh International Festival Chorus.

Frances qualified as a guide in June and has now completed her first season of guiding with us.

**Dorothy Ciesielska** (below) qualified towards the end of the recent guiding season, but still managed to squeeze in a couple of tours (including one in Polish). A native of Gdynia in northern Poland, she arrived in Edinburgh in November 2017, and has devoted a lot of time since then to learning about our local history and culture. She has worked as a freelance guide for a Polish tour operator as well as for Edinburgh Bus Tours.



**Neil Shaw** has resigned as an active guide after nineteen years of service. He writes, 'I have always enjoyed [the Association's] friendly atmosphere, and would especially like to remember two late very dear friends, Archie Blyth who was Chairman when I joined, and Bob Holburn.'

Another long-standing member, **Margaret Marr**, has also

resigned. She qualified as a guide in 1995 and served for six years on the committee. Both Neil and Margaret now join the ranks of honorary guides.

**Sandy Cameron**, having been unwell for most of this year, has resigned from the committee and from the role of Secretary. He hopes to resume guiding when he is fit again.

**Eric Melvin** will continue as Acting Secretary until the next AGM.

Sadly, we must also report two recent deaths. **Liz Keeves** died in July at the age of 81 after a short illness. Liz guided with us for 25 years, and was a committee member since 2013. A retired PE teacher, she also volunteered with St Andrew's First Aid.

In August, **Andy Downie** passed away at the age of 82. Andy was an Edinburgh native who lived in the city all his life apart from his National Service. He worked as an engineering fitter, but his main interest was local history. His widow, Brenda, tells us that 'he was never happier than when he was recounting tales of Edinburgh history to anyone who was prepared to listen. He very much enjoyed his time with the Festival Guides. He had finally found his niche in life.'





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## Summer Soirée

Thirty guides attended our summer soirée at the Botanic Cottage in June. As well as being an opportunity to meet and socialise with our fellow guides, the evening provided a chance to look around this interesting building and to learn something of its history.

The Botanic Cottage originally stood at the entrance to the Botanic Garden in Leith Walk. As well as serving as the principal gardener's home, it contained a classroom where medical students were taught botany. After the garden moved to Inverleith in the 1820s, the cottage had a variety of uses, including a private residence, an office and a shop. In recent years it was abandoned and became derelict. Faced with its demolition, campaigners raised funds to have the building moved stone by stone to its present site in Inverleith Place. The move was completed in 2016.

Gerry Gallagher, who was Project Manager for the move, gave us a fascinating talk on the history of the cottage and of how the rebuilding was achieved. Laura Gallagher, the building's Operations Coordinator, then told us about the various educational and community events for which the cottage is now used. Our thanks to both speakers for their interesting insights, and also to the several members of our committee who organised the very successful evening.

- Following feedback about the soirée, the committee has decided to organise a similar event for Summer 2019. Look out for details nearer the time.



The cottage at its new location in Inverleith Place.



Socialising at the soirée (left to right): Val Baker, Elspeth McLean, Murray Carmichael, Christine Stevenson.



Dr. Arran Johnston, in the guise of a member of the Town Guard, led a group of guides on a tour of the city walls in October. Starting at a surviving remnant of the King's Wall in Tweeddale Court, we traced the Flodden and Telfer walls from the Pleasance to the Castle. Dr. Johnston gave us insights into the walls' military importance, and explained the role they played in some of the great events in Edinburgh history.

# Newsletter

## Water pipes surface



As we all know, the cannonball (left) that gives Cannonball House its name marks the 'gravitational height' of the springs in Comiston. Starting

around 1674, these springs supplied fresh water to the Old Town. The water was carried in pipes by gravity and stored in a reservoir at the top of Castlehill. From there, it was piped to the familiar well-heads along the Royal Mile.

The first pipes were made of lead, but this proved difficult to install and maintain. They were later replaced by wooden pipes. When these started to deteriorate, they were in turn replaced by cast iron.

During recent sewer-renewal works around the Meadows, contractors unearthed some well-preserved fragments of the original wooden pipes. These were made of elm, which was favoured because of its damp-repellent qualities. Entire tree trunks were hollowed out by means of an auger and then slotted together to form a continuous pipe-line.

The system of feeding water to the well-heads continued until the 1820s, after which it was piped directly into people's homes. In 1849, the original reservoir was replaced by a more modern structure which continued in use until 1992. That building now houses the Tartan Weaving Mill.

Our picture (right) shows some of the wooden pipes unearthed near the Meadows. These are now on display in an enclosure at the north end of Middle Meadow Walk.



## Keeping in Touch

**Please be sure to keep the Acting Secretary up to date with any changes to your address, phone numbers (including mobile) or email address.**

The use of email for correspondence is very much easier, faster and cheaper than conventional mail, so if you have an email address but haven't yet given it to the Secretary, please do so.

You can use the following contact details to get in touch with committee members:

- For information about guides' training, or for enquiries from potential new guides, contact Val Baker:  
training@edinburghfestivalguides.org or phone 0131 669 3767.
- For enquiries about custom (bespoke) tours, contact Maureen McMillan:  
tours@edinburghfestivalguides.org
- For queries about our website and for contributions to the newsletter, contact Mike Lewis:  
webmaster@edinburghfestivalguides.org or phone 0131 623 4198.
- To notify changes to your contact details and for all other correspondence, contact the Acting Secretary, Eric Melvin:  
info@edinburghfestivalguides.org

The above email addresses may be considered permanent. Even if the committee roles change, the email addresses will remain the same.

Postal address: EFVGA, c/o 33/3 Blackford Road, Edinburgh EH9 2DT.

**www.edinburghfestivalguides.org**

*Our website includes a password-protected 'guides only' section. If you have forgotten the password, contact Mike Lewis.*

The Association's Facebook page is now live. If you are active on social media, please like or share the page, which can be found by searching for **EFVGA** within Facebook. Thanks to Jim Eunson for setting this up.