



Newsletter

Summer 2021

A 'blended' tour programme for this year's Festival

The EFVGA Committee has decided that our season of Festival tours will definitely go ahead this year, but in a somewhat different format and on a reduced scale. For the first time, we will be offering a mix of in-person and on-line tours. This is in line with moves by both the International Festival and the Fringe, which aim to reduce the capacity of live events, while making at least some of their offerings available to a wider audience on line. The Fringe in particular will be on a much smaller scale this year, with far fewer visitors expected to travel here.

Running on-line tours will be a new experience for us. Eric Melvin and Elspeth McLean have been hard at work creating an audio-visual presentation which we will deliver via the Fringe's dedicated digital platform. The virtual tour will be available throughout the period of the Fringe, free of charge, to audiences around the world. It will last approximately one hour.

Reduced frequency

Meanwhile, we will be reducing the frequency of our in-person tours from seven days a week to just three. The tours will take place on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, at 10 am and 2 pm, from the 9th to the 27th August. That's a total of 18 slots, compared to the usual 50.

We are advertising the tours as lasting ninety minutes rather than the usual two hours. We will of course take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that these tours conform with the Covid guidelines in force at the time. As always, the tours will be free.



Photo: Eric Melvin

Our picture shows a Covid-aware Vic Aitken leading a tour during our cut-down 2020 Festival season. We ran tours on just nine afternoons last August. Despite the cancellation of the Festival and Fringe, and with virtually no publicity, we managed to attract 73 visitors, which was proportionately more than in a normal year. A total of twelve guides took part. We observed strict Covid guidelines on social distancing and group sizes, and went beyond the requirements by operating a Test and Protect system. The tours earned seven new 5-star reviews on TripAdvisor, at least one of which specifically praised us for our Covid precautions.

2021 FESTIVAL DATES

Fringe (6 – 30 August): A greatly reduced programme, with a mix of in-person and on-line events. No printed brochure.

International Festival (7 – 29 August): A reduced programme, with some events being recorded for later on-line viewing. Fewer venues than usual.

Book Festival (14 – 30 August): Venue changed to the Edinburgh College of Art in Lauriston Place, with a mix of in-person and on-line events.

The **Tattoo** will not take place.

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Guide News

We are delighted to welcome several new guides to our ranks.

Louise Rodgers is a full-time veterinary nurse who has lived in Edinburgh for most of her life. As a mature student, she has gained a Bachelor of Music degree as well as a Master's degree in Ritual Chant and Song.

Lesley Pert is a native of Arbroath. She has spent most of her adult life in Edinburgh, having worked for Edinburgh University and the National Autistic Society, for whom she still serves as a part-time student mentor. She is also the co-ordinator of the local branch of Free Cakes for Kids, a UK service that helps families who find it difficult to provide a birthday cake for their child.

Ivy Tao was born in mainland China. After training as a nurse in Hong Kong, she came to Scotland to study midwifery, and has been here ever since. She retired three years ago. She discovered the EFVGA while looking for a history course at the university.

As this newsletter was being prepared, we heard that a further trainee, **Gail Joughin**, has qualified. More information next time.

Sadly, three of our number have passed away since our last newsletter.

One of our longest-serving guides, **Dorothy Ellen**, died last August. Dorothy was an enthusiastic member of our guiding team for many years. She had an extensive knowledge of Edinburgh, and was a valuable source of information about the EFVGA and its history. She became an Honorary Guide in 2017.

Dorothy Peay died earlier this year at the age of 87. Dorothy joined our team in 1995. She served for 20 years before being obliged to retire for health reasons.

In June of this year, **Joyce Grainger** died at Murrayfield Nursing Home. Joyce had a long career in medicine, having worked at Bangour Hospital in West Lothian and the Western General. She was also actively involved with the work of the Royal College of Physicians. She served as a guide between 1995 and 2004.

ILLUSTRATED TALKS

The National Covenant, Jacobites battles and Gladstone's Land are the subjects examined in our programme of talks for the coming Festival season. Because of Covid restrictions, these talks will take place on line via Zoom.

- **Wednesday 11 August: The Signing of the National Covenant.** Richard Frazer examines the question of how much good the signing of the National Covenant in Greyfriars Kirk in 1638 did for Scotland, Christianity and the world. *Richard Frazer is the minister at Greyfriars Kirk.*
- **Tuesday 17 August: The Battlefield Leaders and Military Achievements of the Jacobites.** Arran Johnston will appraise the leadership of the three great battles of the '45: Prestonpans, Falkirk and Culloden. He will also discuss the contentious issue of modern developments at historic battlefield sites. *Arran Johnston is the Director of the Scottish Battlefields Trust and a regular speaker at our illustrated talks.*
- **Wednesday 25 August: Renovations at Gladstone's Land.** Kate Stephenson will give an insight into the historical research behind the recent transformation of Gladstone's Land (see facing page). *Kate Stephenson is the Visitor Services Manager at Gladstone's Land.*

All talks start at 7 pm and last one hour. Admission is free.

Further details of the subjects and speakers can be found on our website.

The talks are open to all EFVGA members and to the general public. Feel free to pass the details to family and friends.

To join a talk, use these Zoom login details:

Meeting ID: 949 5737 1668

Passcode: 736059

For further information, please email booktalk@edinburghfestivalguides.org.

Around the Royal Mile

Gladstone's Land is once again receiving visitors after its £1.4 million restoration project. The National Trust for Scotland (NTS) property now offers a 'new immersive visitor experience', with visitors being actively encouraged to interact with the exhibits, handle objects, sit on chairs and open doors and cabinets.

The museum space has been extended to cover three floors. It includes replicas of the stock room of a 17th-century spice merchant who once occupied the building, and that of a draper's shop which sold silks, laces and printed cottons; this includes costumes that visitors can try on. Another part of the museum depicts the interior of an early 20th-century boarding house.

Gladstone's Land closed for renovation work in February 2020 and re-opened in May of this year. It is now open daily from 10 am to 3 pm. Access is by guided or self-guided tours, with advance booking recommended.

- Edinburgh Council and the Scottish Historic Buildings Trust (SHBT) have announced plans for the future of the **Tron Kirk**. In the short term, the SHBT will take over the management of the building, with the aim of putting it back into use as soon as possible. The Trust will then carry out a feasibility study into its long-term potential. Once funding has been secured, they will be given a 125-year lease on the site.

- The **Fruitmarket Gallery** in Market Street has re-opened after a £4.3 million renovation which involved extending the building into the former night-club next door. The gallery, which is open daily from 11 am to 6 pm, is currently hosting an exhibition of sculptures by the Scottish artist, Karla Black.

- The **Physic Garden** in the Abbey Strand is now open to the public. Its aim is to recreate the original physic garden established at Holyrood in the 17th century by Sir Robert Sibbald and Sir Andrew Balfour. This later formed the basis of the Royal Botanic Garden in Inverleith. The new garden is open seven days a week, with free admission.



Photo: Mike Lewis

Road works are currently causing considerable disruption in the lower High Street, with the carriageway fenced off and no crossing points between Blackfriars Street and the Netherbow. The work, which involves renewing the setts, is scheduled to continue until late December. However, we understand that it will be paused during August.



Our picture shows Dr Kate Stephenson sampling the wares of an ice cream parlour which now occupies part of the ground floor of Gladstone's Land. This offers flavours which it says are associated with the first sale of ice cream in Edinburgh in the 1900s. Dr Stephenson, who was responsible for the historical research behind the building's restoration, will be talking about that work as part of our programme of illustrated talks in August (see facing page).

Photo: The Herald

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Committee Changes

Three committee members retired at our virtual AGM in March. There were Mike Lewis, Maureen McMillan and Christine Stevenson. Four new committee members were elected, bringing the strength up to eleven.

The full committee is now as follows: Bernard Heavie (Chair), Val Baker (Vice Chair), Eric Melvin (Secretary), Calum MacLeod (Treasurer), Vic Aitken, Gill Davidson, Jim Eunson, Frances McDevitt, Elspeth McLean, Gordon MacLeod and Graham Sutherland.



Photo: Mike Lewis

Our branded umbrellas have proved very successful in helping visitors to find us at our meeting point. But amidst the hub-bub and confusion of the Fringe, they sometimes go missing and are expensive to replace.

If you happen to have one of these umbrellas in your possession, please bring it back to the City Chambers on your first tour of the season, or contact any committee member to arrange its return.

Keeping in Touch

Please be sure to keep the 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 Vic Aitken: tours@edinburghfestivalguides.org
- For queries about our website, contact Elspeth McLean: webmaster@edinburghfestivalguides.org or phone 07753 123499.
- To notify changes to your contact details and for all other correspondence, contact the Secretary, Eric Melvin: info@edinburghfestivalguides.org or phone 0131 447 5578.

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

Postal address: EFVGA, 6 Cluny Place, Edinburgh EH10 4RL.

www.edinburghfestivalguides.org

Our website includes a password-protected 'guides only' section. If you have forgotten the password, contact Elspeth McLean.

- Find us on Facebook: www.facebook.com/EFVGA.
- For our TripAdvisor page, go to tripadvisor.co.uk and search for EFVGA.
- For our Wikipedia page, go to en.wikipedia.org and search for EFVGA.