



Edinburgh Festival Voluntary Guides Association

# Newsletter

Autumn 2024

Welcome to the Autumn Newsletter with a message from the Chair on our successful guiding activities over the summer.

Guides who led the refresher walks in July have provided a brief account of their tours & there is a report on the visit to Dundas House.

If you have some ideas about what you would enjoy reading in future newsletters, please get in touch with the editor, Olwyn Alexander: [newsletter@edinburghfestivalguides.org](mailto:newsletter@edinburghfestivalguides.org)

## A Message from the Chair

Bernard Heavie

A huge thank you to all who took tours on the Royal Mile this year. The numbers have held up well when compared to recent years. The weather was kind to us and the arrangements at the City Chambers worked well except for one occasion when the fire alarm went off and another when a Canadian Pipe Band turned up. Both events meant the co-ordinator had to leave the quadrangle with our visitors.

The decision to go free but ticketed helped us identify the split between morning and afternoon sessions. This year we decided to schedule four guides plus a co-ordinator in the mornings and two guides and a co-ordinator in the afternoons. This means that virtually all guides took a tour and the numbers who turn up are more evenly spread across the available guides. The numbers for morning & afternoon tours were 603 and 360, a total of 963. This is just slightly down on last year's total of 1009. On the last Saturday of the Fringe we welcomed the Spice Social group with 45 of their members. This is the 14th year they have come back to take our tour. The leaders asked after Sandy and Gladys and asked for their good wishes to be passed on.

Our 5 star reviews continue to come in. Unfortunately we have had one 4 star review. The reviewer felt our tour was a "bit dry for children". Anecdotal evidence suggests that there has been an increase in the number of families with children so the committee will address the point at a meeting in October.

Once again thank you to all and all the best whatever you will be doing in the coming months.

## Refresher walks for Guides July 2024

Prior to the season of Festival tours, a series of informal walks took place in July. Each guide has provided brief highlights of their walk.

### Women in the Old Town with Olwyn Alexander

The social system in Scotland from 17th century relegated women to the roles of daughter, wife, mother & responsible widow. Changes to agricultural practices and the rise of merchant or craft guilds and professions such as the church, medicine or law, excluded women from areas of formal economic activity that had been informal, e.g. healthcare. However, they worked within the system as they found it in order to succeed.

An important distinction between Scotland and England was the concept of 'femme couverte'. In England, a married woman took the name of her husband for her economic activities, whereas in Scotland she could keep her own name. Under their own name, women could obtain burgess status, which they could inherit from their father or their husband when he died. They did not have voting rights and could not serve in the administration of guilds or companies but had the 'freedom of the burgh' and hence the right to trade.

Some notable women, who had successful careers were Mary Erskine, Agnes Campbell and Sibilla Hutton. Mary Erskine, inherited her husband's failing druggist business in the High Street and turned it around. She dealt in property, rented booths and shops in the Royal Mile, and established a bank. She donated money towards the education of young girls in the Merchant Maiden school, now named after her. Agnes Campbell was an entrepreneur who styled herself Relict of Andrew Anderson when her husband died so she could continue to print the King's Bible. She

expanded the printing business with a sideline in papermaking and left a fortune of £78,000 Scots on her death.

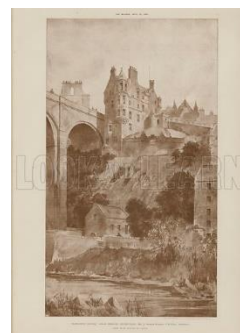


Edinburgh to open a shop in London.

Sibilla Hutton was a milliner, drawn by John Kay with an elaborate costume and hat. She had a shop in the Royal Exchange but she built a bow window without permission and was ordered to remove it by the Dean of Guild. She later left

### Dean Village with Elspeth McLean

The Dean Village, once known as the village of the Water of Leith, was a milling community dating back to the 12th century, using water power to provide flour for Edinburgh and surrounding villages. The village industries flourished and expanded before steam power took over. The tannery and the last of the mills closed in the 1970s. Bell's Brae was the main road out of Edinburgh to South Queensferry, before the building of the Belford and Dean bridges bypassed the village.



Kirkbrae House was originally an inn, the 'Baxter's House of Call', where bakers could enjoy a rest and refreshment after the steep climb out of the village on their way towards Edinburgh. In the 19th century, it housed a successful cab business, run by James 'Cabbie' Stewart, who also owned stables, cab garages and a smithy. Stewart's coachmen were always smartly dressed with top hats. He would send his stable boy out with fresh horses to meet his cabs as they approached Edinburgh. The change meant the horses looked

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striking as they arrived over the Dean Bridge and into the New Town

A prominent reminder of the village's early heritage is the Baxter's Tolbooth at the bottom of Bell's Brae, now converted into flats. From 1675 it was the headquarters and granary for the Incorporation of Baxters. Other reminders of the village's milling past include the large milling stones from Lindsay's Mills and the carved inscriptions showing the bakers' peels (paddles) with 3 cakes and a pie.

At the centre of Dean Village is Well Court. It was built in 1884 as social housing with a community hall and paid for by 'The Scotsman' newspaper owner and philanthropist John Ritchie Findlay. It is said this was not an entirely altruistic venture as his home overlooked Dean Village and he benefited from the improved view! At the end of our tour we had permission, to enter Findlay's former home (now run as a B&B) and enjoy the view for ourselves.

### New Town with Eric Melvin

The tour began at the Wellington Statue and explored the eastern part of the New Town. The campaign to build the New Town was led by Lord Provost George Drummond, who died before his vision was realised. Key buildings are Register House, designed by Robert Adam, and the famous Theatre Royal on the site of the old GPO building. This theatre hosted the first appearance of London actress Sarah Siddons playing Lady Randolph in the play 'The Douglas'. A short walk along Gabriel's Road leads to St Andrew Square, the home of some early New Town residents including Hugo Arnot, William Creech, David Hume and the Durham courtesan Frances Burns. She took up residence in an apartment next to that



of William Creech. He took great exception to the regular arrival of gentleman clients and the noise from the property. He had Burns prosecuted at the burgh court, sitting on the bench himself. Found guilty, she was sentenced to six months in the Tollbooth and banishment from Edinburgh. However, backed by some powerful friends, she successfully appealed and Creech was ridiculed. Sadly, she contracted consumption and died at Lasswade in 1792 aged just 23.

One of the earliest grand residences is the home of Sir Lawrence Dundas, now the RBS building. Directly opposite is the Melville Monument, erected in 1811 in honour of the controversial politician Henry Dundas. From there a short walk leads to Thistle Court and the first house built in the New Town in 1767. At this end of George Street sits a statue of the famous Scottish scientist James Clark Maxwell, whose electromagnetic field equations paved the way for Albert Einstein's theories. After a brief stop inside the former St Andrew's Church, scene of the 1843 Disruption of the Church of Scotland, the tour finished at East Princes Street Gardens to see the Scott Monument.

### Stockbridge with Mike Lewis



Stockbridge is often described as a 'village'. The Sunday Times recently wrote about its 'village feel', while the Academy of Urbanism said that it was 'the very image of an idealised urban village'. But Stockbridge was never a village. A 1743 map shows it as open

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country with only Deanhaugh House, in what is now Leslie Place, and St Bernard's House, in Carlton Street.

Deanhaugh House was owned by a certain James Leslie. After he died, his widow, Ann, commissioned an up-and-coming young artist to paint her portrait. A spark of romance was kindled between them and they were married shortly afterwards. His name: Henry Raeburn.

In 1809 Raeburn purchased St. Bernard's House and its surrounding land. By now, the narrow stock (timber) bridge over the Water of Leith that gave the area its name had been replaced by a substantial stone bridge capable of taking wheeled vehicles, thus opening up the area for development. In 1813, Raeburn started feuing his land, resulting in the Raeburn Estate. With its elegant late-Georgian terraces and crescents, it is often described as a northward extension of the New Town.

The name St Bernard is thought to refer to a 12th century French abbot named Bernard of Clairvaux. Local legend claims this St Bernard discovered the medicinal springs beside the Water of Leith that later developed as St Bernard's Well. It is also claimed that he lived in a cave on Randolph Cliff. However, Bernard of Clairvaux was a highly-influential leader of the Cistercian order, a key figure in church politics, a co-founder of the Knights Templar and an instigator of the Second Crusade. The idea of his living in a cave in Edinburgh is just a good story.

Stockbridge today is a popular residential area, much visited by tourists. It is known for its Sunday market, trendy pubs and independent shops, especially its many charity shops. According to one source, Stockbridge has the highest concentration of charity shops in Scotland.

**Keeping in Touch**

The EFVGA website

[www.edinburghfestivalguides.org](http://www.edinburghfestivalguides.org)

includes a password-protected 'guides only' section, where you can find a list of current committee members & their contact details. This section is password protected. If you have forgotten the password, contact Jim Eunson.

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

For general correspondence, contact Chair, Bernard Heavie:

[info@edinburghfestivalguides.org](mailto:info@edinburghfestivalguides.org)

For information about guides' training, or for enquiries from potential new guides, contact Vice-Chair, Val Baker:

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To notify changes to your contact details and for queries about our website or to request the password, contact Jim Eunson:

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## Visit to Dundas House

12 guides were given a tour of Dundas House, a branch of the Royal Bank of Scotland in St Andrew Square, by Muzo Emek, who has worked for the Bank for over 30 years, conducting tours for the last ten. Hailing from the ancient city of Bodrum in Turkey, he is passionate about Scottish history, and was sporting a fine kilt with 'good knees' as he put it. The entrance and banking hall are open to the public and well worth a visit. The banking hall is a Victorian addition, completed in 1861, and acknowledged to be one of the most beautiful in Britain.

It has a domed ceiling made up of five concentric tiers of glazed stars, diminishing in size towards the central glass cupola.



Dundas House was built in 1772 by Sir Lawrence Dundas of Kerse (near Falkirk), Member of Parliament for Edinburgh and governor of the Royal Bank of Scotland. The site was intended for a church by James Craig, architect of the New Town plan of 1767, but Sir Lawrence feued the plot, which was next to land he already owned, and began building one of the first houses in the New Town. He came from a modest background but made his money supplying goods and services to the British Army during the Jacobite rebellion. He invested in land at Grangemouth and was a major shareholder in the Forth and Clyde canal. James Boswell described him as 'a comely jovial Scotch gentleman of good address but not bright parts'.

Sir Lawrence's stay in the house was brief. When he died in 1781, the house was sold to the government to become the principal office of the Excise in Scotland. By the 1820s, the property was no longer suitable for the Excise and was put up for sale. It was bought by the Royal Bank of Scotland, which had recently moved from the Old Town into the adjacent building, at a cost of £35,300 (more than £2.5 million today). They wished to avoid the possibility of a rival bank moving next door.

We visited parts of the building not open to the public, in which the layout is still similar to the original mansion. There is a collection of portraits of former managing directors, called cashiers in the old parlance, including Archibald Campbell Lord Islay, its first governor, whose portrait hangs in the original dining room. This room is available free of charge for charitable events. As with many former houses converted to business use, there was little evidence of its former grandeur beyond plaster ceilings, ornate carved fireplaces and occasional cabinets and bookshelves. Our tour finished below stairs for a look at the large safes, once used for safe custody but now standing empty.

## Questions from tours

Jock Anderson provided some unusual questions he has received on his tours:

Who owns Edinburgh Castle?

*Owned by Ministers of the Scottish Government and operated by Historic Scotland*

How many Catholics in Edinburgh?

*20,000, according to Catholic church site.*

Have you had any unusual questions on your tours that you can share with other guides? Please send questions & answers to

[newsletter@edinburghfestivalguides.org](mailto:newsletter@edinburghfestivalguides.org)

## Image teaser



This stone remnant was once part of a water fountain gifted to the city by Catherine Sinclair, one of 13 children of Sir John Sinclair, statistician and agriculturalist. She was a successful children's author & philanthropist.

The fountain stood at the junction of Princes Street and Lothian Road but was later removed and



held in storage until 1983 when this remnant was placed by the Water of Leith pedestrian and cycle path at Gosford Place in Leith. It is unknown where the other parts of the structure are now. [Catherine Sinclair | Mapping Memorials to Women in Scotland \(womenofscotland.org.uk\)](https://www.womenofscotland.org.uk)

## The next challenge

This stone edifice is a memorial to a significant event in Edinburgh. Without consulting Google, do you know where it is located and what it commemorates? Thanks to Gill Davidson for this idea.



## Spotlight on guides

Sandy Macpherson reflects on his involvement with EFVGA.

*How long have you been a guide?*

I started in 1994. I had retired the previous year and always had an interest in history and enjoyed meeting people. I was already guiding in St Giles and the Royal Mile was a good follow on.

*What's the most disconcerting thing that happened to you on a tour?*

A couple of years ago when taking a group into the Canongate Kirk, I found we were locked in. A large lorry loading up with scaffolding had parked blocking the gateway to the church and street, totally preventing entry and exit. I eventually ran out of things to tell my group and let them browse around on their own, which they seemed happy to do. When eventually we were free to go I apologised to the group for the long delay. However, they all stayed with me to the gates of the Palace.

*Who's your favourite Royal Mile or Edinburgh character?*

Deacon Brodie, the prototype for Jekyll and Hyde. How many public figures today lead double lives? At least now, when found out they are not hanged in public!

*What have you found most rewarding about EFVGA?*

Meeting so many people from the ends of the earth and trying to enthuse them into another country's history.

*What advice would you give new guides?*

Wear something to stand out in a crowd. I always wear a kilt and carry a flag. Try to engage with your group at all time.