



Edinburgh Festival Voluntary Guides Association

Newsletter

Summer 2019

EFVGA Joins Open Streets Project

In what could be a useful new initiative for us, the Association has been taking part in Edinburgh Council's Open Streets project. At the time of writing, we have participated in two of these events, in May and June respectively. A third is being planned for early July.

The idea behind Open Streets is that large parts of the Old Town are closed to motor vehicles – and therefore open to people – on one Sunday afternoon each month. The aim is to encourage local people to visit the city centre, to enjoy a traffic-free environment, and to take part in some of the many activities on offer. The streets affected include almost the entire length of the Royal Mile, as well as Cockburn Street, Victoria Street, part of the Grassmarket and several adjoining streets.

Traffic-free tours

The Association has been taking advantage of the traffic-free streets by offering free walking tours during the Open Streets afternoons. We see these tours as tasters for our main Festival tours, helping to raise our profile among local people. The tours start from the City Chambers and last 50 minutes each.

So far, our visitor numbers have been modest, with six customers on the first day and ten on the second. But we expect that to increase as the Council starts to improve its publicity for these events.

The feedback from these first tours has been excellent, with at least one glowing review being posted on TripAdvisor. There has also been good feedback from the guides who led



the walks. Clearly, guiding in a relatively quiet traffic-free Royal Mile is a lot more enjoyable than struggling against the crowds and the noise of the Fringe.

Plans

The Council's present plan is to continue with Open Streets into July, to take a break during August, and to review the situation for September. It is not yet clear whether the events will continue into the autumn or winter – or in fact whether they will continue at all.

In the long term, the Council sees Open Streets as an experimental first step towards their ambitious City Centre Transformation project, which, if it comes about, could lead to major environmental improvements throughout the city. But that's a long way off, and is by no means certain to happen.



With or without Open Streets, the idea of running our tours on Sunday afternoons outside the Festival is an appealing one, and one that we will be considering for the future.

OUR 2019 AGM

Our AGM in March was addressed by Cllr. Lezley Marion Cameron, one of five bailies on the City of Edinburgh Council. Cllr. Cameron confessed that, before her appointment, she didn't know what a bailie was. The post had been disbanded in 1975 but revived in the 2000s. Nowadays, bailies deputise for the Lord Provost at official functions and civic events.

Cllr. Cameron spoke of her pleasure in being immersed in the life of the city. She also referred to the challenges facing Edinburgh, not least of which were the pressures caused by tourism, especially in the Royal Mile – a theme that is familiar to all of us.

Earlier, EFVGA Chairman Christine Stevenson reported on our activities over the last year. She said that we couldn't ignore the fact that our Festival numbers were falling, despite our strenuous efforts at improving our publicity. But we have had some successes as well. We enjoyed an excellent season of illustrated talks in August; our summer soirée in June was a success, as were our two educational visits; and our out-of-season tours continue to attract good numbers: 117 in the last 12 months.

Finances

Reporting on our finances, Treasurer Richard Richardson said that we had a deficit of £953, but this was nothing to be alarmed about. It comes from a strong position and we still have a healthy bank balance. An important factor was the high expenditure on Fringe

Guide News

One of our recently-qualified guides, Dorota Ciesielska, has had to return to Poland for family reasons, and has reluctantly resigned. We now have 36 active guides, 32 honorary guides and two potential guides under training. We still need to recruit more guides to cover all our tours, so please contact Val Baker* if you know any potential trainees.



Cllr. Cameron (left) presents an EFVGA badge to one of our newest guides, Frances McDevitt, who completed her first season of guiding with us last summer.

publicity in 2018, which won't be repeated this year. And despite the falling numbers during the Festival, donations in that period were slightly higher than the previous year.

Braid Meeting

Eric Melvin reported on the meeting at the Braid Bowling Club in November. It was generally agreed that this had been successful, with a largely positive mood amongst the guides. One of the concerns that was raised was the noise and crowds in the Royal Mile, with a few guides even thinking of giving up because of this. Guides would now be encouraged to move out of the Royal Mile if they wished, for example to cover the Grassmarket, Greyfriars or even the New Town (training walks for these areas could be arranged in necessary). Eric also asked that guides play a greater role in publicising our tours, for example by distributing leaflets, putting up posters or simply spreading the word.

Committee changes

Jim Eunson has now joined the committee. Eric Melvin has been confirmed as Secretary (after serving as Acting Secretary for most of last year). Bernard Heavie has taken over Eric's role as Vice Chairman. Other committee roles are unchanged.

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

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2019 ILLUSTRATED TALKS

The geology of Edinburgh, the Porteous Riots and the Battle of Dunbar are among the subjects examined in our programme of talks during the coming Festival season.

The talks all take place at 7.30 pm in the City Chambers (doors open at 7.00 pm). The talks are free and open to all.

The full programme is as follows:

Friday 2 August: The Battle of Dunbar

How Oliver Cromwell's army, in one of the most important battles of the English Civil War, crushed a Scottish army twice its size, leading to ten years of occupation and rule by the Commonwealth. *Speaker:* Arran Johnston.

Thursday 8 August: The Porteous Riots

The dramatic story of a public execution, a riot and a lynching, illustrated by contemporary eyewitness accounts and newspaper reports. *Speaker:* Eric Melvin.

Wednesday 14 August: Volcanoes and Ice: The Making of Edinburgh's Landscape

How Edinburgh's spectacular landscape was formed by hundreds of millions of years of geological activity, including volcanic eruptions, the slow accumulation of sediment, and a long period of erosion. *Speaker:* Angus Miller.



Tuesday 20 August:

Scotland: Her Story

Scotland's rich, robust and endlessly fascinating history seen through the eyes of its women, from the medieval

Queen Margaret to today's First Minister. *Speaker:* Rosemary Goring (pictured here).

Thanks to Maureen McMillan for arranging these events. There are more details of the subjects and speakers on our website.



Our picture shows part of the Apprentice Pillar at Rosslyn Chapel. According to legend, it was created by an apprentice stonemason while his master was on a visit to Rome. When the master returned, he saw that the pillar was more beautiful than anything he could have created himself, and he struck and killed the apprentice in a jealous rage.

The story of the Apprentice Pillar is just one of the many stories, myths and legends surrounding Rosslyn Chapel. In April, sixteen of our guides had a chance to hear this and other stories while on a private out-of-hours visit to this fascinating building.

The group was welcomed by Ian Gardner, Director of the Rosslyn Chapel Trust, after which Maureen Moffat, one of the chapel's guides, explained its long and interesting history. She talked about the determination of the St Clair family to maintain the site during the turbulent religious changes over the centuries, even while the chapel lay forlorn and unused. After the talk, the group had the opportunity to explore the building in detail.

Thanks to Val Baker for organising what was undoubtedly a very worthwhile visit.

Training walk

Eric Melvin will be leading an Old Town / New Town training walk on the morning of Saturday 6th July. This walk will be of interest to guides who wish to venture beyond the Royal Mile for their tours during the Festival. If you would like to take part in the training walk and have not yet notified Eric, please do so as soon as possible*.

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

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Royal Mile News



This memorial to the Polish soldier, Stanisław Maczek, now adorns the **City Chambers** forecourt. As the command-

er of a Polish armoured division in World War II, General Maczek fought with the Allies in the Battle of Normandy and played a significant role in the liberation of the Netherlands. After the war, the Communist government in Warsaw stripped him of his citizenship, forcing him to remain in the UK. The British government refused him a military pension, and he was obliged to take a menial job in an Edinburgh hotel. He was eventually rescued from his financial plight by the Dutch government, who paid him a pension for the rest of his life. He died in Edinburgh in 1994.

The memorial statue, with its accompanying bench, was unveiled last November in the presence of its Polish sculptor, Bronisław Krzysztof.



Another newcomer to the Royal Mile is this hand-crafted granite Celtic cross, which has been erected in **Makars' Court** to commemorate Scotland's First World War poets. The monument includes a quotation from Neil Munro's poem 'Lament for the Lads'.

- The National Museum of Scotland was again Scotland's most popular visitor attraction in 2018, and Edinburgh Castle the most popular paid-for attraction. Each received over two million visitors. The Scottish National Gallery and St Giles' Cathedral welcomed over one million visitors each.

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 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 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, 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.



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For our TripAdvisor page, go to
tripadvisor.co.uk and search for EFVGA.