



Newsletter

July 2017

Our birthday bash



On a beautiful sunny evening in May, Association chairman Christine Stevenson welcomed 37 guests to our 70th anniversary dinner. The restaurant in the Royal Overseas League Club was an ideal venue, with its wonderful views of the Castle and the Old Town.

Christine paid tribute to the many guides who over the years have given their time, effort and loyalty to the Association. In particular she thanked the six guides who had recently completed long periods of service on the committee (see our AGM report on page 2).

Christine then referred to the Association's 'Brief History', a printed copy of which was available at the dinner. Based on material originally provided by David Strachan, updated by George Laing and edited by Mike Lewis, this made fascinating reading. She thanked David, George and Mike for their efforts. (A copy of the history is now available on our website.)

After a recitation by Vice-Chairman Eric Melvin of the Selkirk Grace, an excellent dinner was enjoyed by all.

The whole evening was an opportunity to relax in the company of friends, and incidentally to learn a bit more about one another's experiences of guiding over the years. For example, Winnie Scott mentioned, amazingly, that she first became a guide as a very young woman back in 1949, only fairly recently

Guide News

We currently have 50 active and 32 honorary guides, with one trainee nearly ready for his test.

These numbers just about cover the Festival season but with little margin for contingencies such as sickness. We therefore need to recruit new guides.

If you know anyone who might be interested in becoming a guide, please encourage them to contact our training coordinator, Vic Aitken*. You can also refer them to the information on our website which explains what the work involves (follow the link to 'Becoming a Guide').

- Since our last newsletter, Sid Caplan has resigned and Dorothy Ellen has become an honorary guide. We are sorry to report that Elizabeth McLeod has died.

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

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AGM News

On 22 March, 26 members of the Association attended our AGM and civic reception, the last one to be addressed by outgoing Lord Provost Donald Wilson. Cllr. Wilson spoke about how, in 1947, when much of Europe was in ruins, his predecessor Sir John Falconer and others created an international festival with a vision of using the arts as a 'language of peace - a true celebration of diversity through culture'. The Edinburgh International Festival, now in its 70th year, is the largest of its kind in the world, bringing visitors from around the globe. 'The Festival Guides play a great part in this, for which we are most grateful,' he said.

As usual, Cllr. Wilson had raided the basement of the City Chambers to find some interesting objects to show us. This time he presented two ornamental Chinese cockerels, each around 18 inches tall. He had not been able to find out what they were or where they came from, but experts had placed them as being from the Qing Dynasty and had valued them at between three and five thousand pounds each.

Earlier, outgoing chairman Kate Dick paid tribute to the Association's retiring committee members, each of whom had given at least six years service. These were George Laing (secretary), Kathleen Hart (treasurer), Gladys Bain, Seonaid Martin and Betty Milton. Kate had herself served on the committee for seven years.

Committee Changes

The new committee is as follows: Christine Stevenson (chairman), Eric Melvin (vice-chairman), Sandy Cameron (secretary), Richard Richardson (treasurer), Maureen McMillan (custom tours), Vic Aitken (training), Mike Lewis (website and newsletter), Val Baker, Liz Keeves, Bernard Heavie, Jan Wallace and Kenny Law.



At the AGM, Olive Morrison asked if anyone knew the fate of the bench which the Association had presented to the city to mark the Festival's 25th anniversary in 1972 but which subsequently disappeared. Olive has now located the bench, which is back in Princes Street (opposite Waterstones) but looking decidedly unloved and litter-strewn (as do many of the other benches in the street). Curiously, the plaque shows the date as 1971. Is this a misprint or were we a year early in marking the anniversary?

Sample tours

As this newsletter goes to press, two sample tours were being organised: in the New Town and Grassmarket respectively. Sample tours are a good way for guides to get to know other parts of the city, with a view to leading their own tours there if they wish. Depending on demand, we hope to organise more sample tours later in the year.

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becoming one of our honorary guides. So a great wealth of experience was celebrated on the occasion of this our 70th anniversary. A toast was drunk to ourselves, the Edinburgh Festival Guides, trusting that we will continue to enjoy what we do and feel pride in showing people aspects of our beloved city.

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At the AGM, Kate Dick paid tribute to two of our guides who had recently passed away.

Joyce Wallace was a well known local historian and lecturer who wrote extensively about Edinburgh, especially its northern districts. Her family associations with Trinity and Leith went back more than a century. She had several books published on the history of those areas.

John Smith spent most of his life working in the tourist industry. A tank transport driver with the Royal Army Service Corps during the Second World War, he served as a Festival Guide for many years and also guided at St Giles. Our picture (left) shows him carrying the Queen's Baton on the Royal Mile for the 2014 Commonwealth Games. He was 88 at the time.

Riddles Court to re-open in August

Riddles Court is due to re-open in August following its £5.9 million refurbishment. The building will be open to the public for special events and on occasional open afternoons but will not normally offer 'free range' access. Its first public event will be a Lego exhibition during this year's Fringe.

Addressing six of our guides at a briefing in May, Russell Clegg of the Scottish Historic Buildings Trust (SHBT) said that the south block will house the Patrick Geddes Centre. The first-floor Seton Room will serve as a library with around a thousand books donated by the NLS. There will be a café on the Victoria Terrace frontage giving access to the rest of the building.

The north block will be let to a commercial tenant, but on condition that the public will be allowed access on designated days. It will also contain a holiday flat, the income from which will help pay the Trust's costs once its funding ends in 2019.

Mr. Clegg said that there would be many volunteering opportunities at the site, including for guides to show visitors around. Our Association is already talking to the SHBT about running walking tours of the Lawn-market area with a Patrick Geddes theme.

More snippets

- Maureen McMillan reports that we have run twelve **custom tours** so far this year (including one in French) with a total of some 60 visitors. As well as being a useful source of income for the Association, these tours give guides the chance to keep their skill sharp in the long months between guiding seasons.
- **Educational visit.** Martin McGibbon, of the Royal Order of Scotland, gave ten of our guides a tour of the Chapel of St John at the Masonic Lodge in St John's Street. Our second visit to the Lodge, this was an opportunity to hear many fascinating stories of its history. Thanks to Kate Dick for organising it.
- The **2017 rota form** should be landing on your doormat around now. The deadline for returning the form is 7 July.
- The **Magdalen Chapel** in the Cowgate is now fully open to the public, Mondays to Fridays, 10:00 to 16:00.
- Following the municipal elections in May, Edinburgh's **new Lord Provost** is Frank Ross, a Corstorphine and Murrayfield ward councillor.

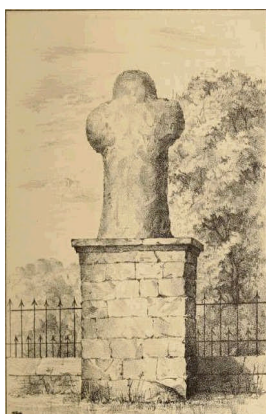
Newsletter

A tale of two statues

By Mike Lewis



Charles II ...



... and all that was left of Cromwell

When I show visitors the equestrian statue of Charles II in Parliament Close, I usually mention the rumour that the figure is really Oliver Cromwell, but because Cromwell had died before the statue was finished, the authorities simply declared it to be Charles instead. Of course, I'm quick to point out that this story is almost certainly a myth, with no sound historical basis.

But it turns out that there is a grain of truth in the story after all. The City Magistrates did indeed commission a statue of the Lord Protector, but one made of stone rather than lead. As was customary, the quarry workers prepared the rough outline of the statue –

the head, arms and upper torso – ready for the sculptor to fill in the details.

By the time the massive stone was landed at Leith, news had arrived of Cromwell's death. The prototype statue was abandoned on the shore, where it lay forgotten for over a century.

Then, in 1788, Walter Ross came on the scene. Ross was one of the great Edinburgh eccentrics. The owner of St Bernard's House in Stockbridge, he discovered the huge piece of rock – it was over eight feet tall – lying in the sands. Despite the fact that much of the head and arms had weathered away, he decided to grab it for his estate. He duly erected it on a plinth on the highest point of his land at the top of what is now Ann Street. And there it stood - 'a monstrous mummy ... like a giant in his shroud, frowning upon the city.'

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 email addresses to get in touch with committee members:

- For information about guides' training, or for enquiries from potential new guides, contact Vic Aitken: training@edinburghfestivalguides.org
- 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
- To notify changes to your contact details and for all other correspondence, contact the Secretary, Sandy Cameron: info@edinburghfestivalguides.org

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

www.edinburghfestivalguides.org

Eventually, St Bernard's House came into the ownership of Sir Henry Raeburn. The estate was feued for building and the statue broken up. As you can see from the pictures on this page, it bore no resemblance to the equestrian Charles II. But it's an interesting reminder of how rumours can sometimes survive and grow over the centuries.

Source: *Historic memorials & reminiscences of Stockbridge, the Dean, and Water of Leith* by Cumberland Hill (Edinburgh, 1887). There is copy of this book (from which the above quotation and the Cromwell picture are taken) in the Central Library's Edinburgh Room.