



Edinburgh Festival Voluntary Guides Association

# Newsletter

Summer 2020

## Salvaging the summer

With the cancellation of the 2020 Edinburgh Festival and Fringe, we are obviously not going to have a normal guiding season this year. The usual hordes of tourists won't be present, the Royal Mile will be abnormally quiet and some lockdown restrictions will still be in force.

Nevertheless, the Committee is anxious that we do not completely abandon our activities in what's left of the summer. With that in mind, we are planning to run a limited number of tours during August – albeit on a much reduced scale. We are clearly not going to attract large numbers of overseas visitors, but we think there might be a market among local people who would otherwise be leaving on holiday or attending other local events such as the Book Festival.

Our current plan is to run two tours per week, on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons during August. Tours will be limited to one hour and we will take steps to keep the groups small – certainly within government guidelines. We are currently drawing up health & safety guidance which we would expect our guides to follow.

### Safety

We can only go ahead with this idea if we are satisfied that we can do so safely. We will take steps to maintain physical distancing; we will not take tours inside buildings; and we will avoid narrow passages, crowded areas and other tour groups. We also plan to maintain a contact register for the purposes of NHS Scotland's Test & Protect scheme.

Of course, this can only happen if enough guides are willing and able to take part. There will be no pressure to do so. We obviously won't want guides to lead tours if they or members of their household have Covid-19 symptoms or

are self-isolating or in quarantine. We also understand that some guides might be reluctant to travel to the city centre or mix with groups of people.

In order for us to judge the likely availability of guides for these tours, we ask that you let us know as soon as possible if you might be willing to take part. This won't commit you to anything. It is just to give us an idea of numbers. Please reply to the following email address:

[2020@edinburghfestivalguides.org](mailto:2020@edinburghfestivalguides.org)

Feel free to use the same address for any questions or comments you might have about these proposed tours.

The Committee believes that it is important for the Association to maintain some sort of presence on the Royal Mile this summer. Please consider helping with this if you can.

- We are also hoping to go ahead with our programme of illustrated talks at some point during the year. This will depend on the availability of the venue and the state of the lockdown restrictions at the time.



A near-deserted Royal Mile on a midweek afternoon in June

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## COMMITTEE CHANGES

Three members of the committee stood down in March. They were **Richard Richardson** (the Treasurer), **Kenny Law** and **Vic Aitken**. Many thanks to them for all their hard work in helping to run the Association over the last few years.

At the same time, three of our guides were nominated to join the committee: **Gill Davidson**, **Frances McDevitt** and **Gordon MacLeod**.

These changes were all due to take effect at our AGM, which had been scheduled to take place on 18 March but which was cancelled because of the Covid-19 outbreak. The new members have now been co-opted to the committee, pending their formal approval by the membership at a later date.

With the stepping down of Richard Richardson, the Association does not have a treasurer at present. For the time being, Richard has agreed to continue to deal with any claims for out-of-pocket expenses and to receive any donations. Our bank account details remain unchanged.

- We currently have seven prospective guides undergoing training. We hope to be able to start assessments for these trainees as soon lockdown conditions permit.



The Association now has a presence on Wikipedia. To find it, go to **en.wikipedia.org** and search for EFVGA.

## Are you an Edinburgh Mastermind?

In May 2019, Mr Amit De, a financial services analyst from Surrey, appeared in the semi-finals of the BBC quiz *Mastermind*, choosing 'Edinburgh' as his specialist subject. He got nine questions right out of the eleven shown here. He ended the contest in third place. Can you do better? (Answers on page 4.)

1. Which bank, founded in 1695 to offer long term credit and security, has its headquarters on Edinburgh's Mound?
2. What is the name of Edinburgh's principal railway station, located at the eastern end of Princes Street?
3. The clock in the tower of the Balmoral Hotel is traditionally set fast to ensure that commuters arrive on time for their train at Waverley. By how many minutes fast is the clock set?
4. What annual event first staged in 1950 takes place over three weeks in August and features displays of marching and massed pipes and drums?
5. What was the name of Sir Walther Scott's deer hound whose statue sits next to that of its owner in the Scott Monument in Princes Street?
6. In 1826, construction began of an exact replica of the Parthenon in Athens, but it was never completed. On what hill is the unfinished structure?
7. In which churchyard in the southern edge of the Old Town is the poet William McGonigal buried?
8. A 23-year old self-taught architect won a competition in 1766 launched by the Lord Provost to design Edinburgh's New Town. What was his name?
9. What is the name of the mosaic of granite cobbled stones set in the pavement outside the west door of St Giles Cathedral that passers-by spit on for luck.
10. Which king popularised the user of tartan when he appeared in Edinburgh in Highland dress during a state visit to Scotland. The visit was the first by a monarch since Charles II.
11. Which former church which is now used as a venue for the Edinburgh Festival takes its name from the public weighbridge that once occupied the site?

## Educational Visits

By the time he was eight years old, James Clerk Maxwell had memorised the whole of Psalm 119, as well as long passages from Milton. At 14, he delivered a paper to the Royal Society of Edinburgh. At 25, he became Professor of Natural Philosophy at Marischal College, Aberdeen - the youngest person ever to hold that post. Today he ranks alongside Newton and Einstein as one of the greatest physicists the world has known.

In November 2019, sixteen of our guides visited this remarkable man's birthplace in India Street. Our host, David Forfar, told us about Maxwell's life and work, and showed us some of the many exhibits that illustrate his achievements – in particular his work on electromagnetic radiation, which provides the basis for almost all the technology that we are familiar with today. "The most stunning conclusion of 19th Century physics" was how Mr Forfar put it.

The visit was followed a few days later by a James Clerk Maxwell-themed walking tour of parts of Stockbridge and the New Town. The tour was supposed to continue to the Old College and the Playfair Library, but the group decided to abandon it because of the atrocious weather. We hope to organise a separate visit to the Playfair Library at some point in the future.

Other recent visits have included the National Portrait Gallery and the Victorian Schoolroom. Thanks to Val Baker for organising all of these enjoyable and educational events.



Maxwell's birthplace at 14 India Street, now the home of the James Clerk Maxwell Foundation.



A young Maxwell at Trinity College, Cambridge. He is holding one of the wheels that he used to demonstrate the concept of colour separation: the basis for modern colour printing and photography.

If you enjoy researching Edinburgh and Scottish history, here are some free on-line resources that you might like to know about.

- Run by Historic Environment Scotland, **SCRAN** contains around 400,000 historic images, videos and audio clips from across Scotland. An individual or family subscription normally costs £15 per year, but it is free for Edinburgh library members. [www.scran.ac.uk](http://www.scran.ac.uk)
- **British Newspaper Archive** gives on-line access to back issues of hundreds of newspapers, including the Scotsman, the Glasgow Herald and many local papers, some going back to the 18th Century. Free for Edinburgh library members. [yourlibrary.edinburgh.gov.uk](http://yourlibrary.edinburgh.gov.uk)
- You can also get on-line access to hundreds of newspaper archives if you have a reader's card for the **National Library of Scotland**. [www.nls.uk](http://www.nls.uk)
- Finally, the **Oxford Dictionary of National Biography** has around 60,000 biographies of significant figures from British history. Edinburgh library members don't have to pay the subscription, which is otherwise £20 per month. [www.oxforddnb.com](http://www.oxforddnb.com)



# Newsletter



A group of guides is pictured here with the Lord Provost Sir James Mackay in 1971. The picture is from *Festival in the North: The Story of the Edinburgh Festival* by George Bruce (1975). Mr Bruce writes, '... with undeviating persistence has been the services of the Festival Guides to visitors. They have given meaning to the *mise-en-scene* of the Festival, historic Edinburgh. Voluntary guides have made "Special Tours" – as the 1947 Souvenir Programme puts it – from that date to the present down the Royal Mile.'



Stanley Cavey, a founder member and later chairman of the Association, gives one of our first illustrated talks, then known as 'lantern lectures'. From the Scotsman, August 1957.

## Quiz answers

1. Bank of Scotland 2. Waverley 3. Three\*  
4. The Military Tattoo 5. Maida 6. Calton Hill  
7. Greyfriars 8. James Craig 9. Heart of Midlothian 10. George IV 11. Tron Kirk\*

\* These are the two that Mr De got wrong. In the case of number 11, the reference to the Edinburgh Festival venue suggests that the question-setter was getting the Tron Kirk confused with the Tolbooth Kirk.

## 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](mailto:training@edinburghfestivalguides.org) or phone 0131 669 3767.
- For enquiries about custom (bespoke) tours, contact Maureen McMillan: [tours@edinburghfestivalguides.org](mailto:tours@edinburghfestivalguides.org)
- For queries about our website and for contributions to the newsletter, contact Mike Lewis: [webmaster@edinburghfestivalguides.org](mailto: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](mailto: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](http://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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[www.facebook.com/EFVGA](http://www.facebook.com/EFVGA).

For our TripAdvisor page, go to [tripadvisor.co.uk](http://tripadvisor.co.uk) and search for EFVGA.

For our Wikipedia page, go to [en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org) and search for EFVGA.