



Edinburgh Festival Voluntary Guides Association

# Newsletter

Summer 2022

## EFVGA 75th Anniversary



Edinburgh Festival Voluntary Guides gather to celebrate 75 years of providing tours on the Royal Mile.

We organised an event for members, former members, their friends and family to go on an informal walk in the Royal Mile area after gathering in our usual place.

The EFVGA started in 1947 when Sir John Falconer (then Lord Provost), Rudolf Bing (then General Manager of the Glyndebourne Opera Festival) and others organised the first Edinburgh International Festival, with Bing as Director. As part of the event, the Lord Provost asked for volunteers to lead visitors on tours of the Royal Mile. Twelve guides volunteered for these first tours, coordinated by John Bowman, a former City Water Engineer. This meant that the EFVGA was a part of the International Festival right from the start.

In 1965 EFVGA member and local councillor Stanley Cavaye produced *The Royal Mile - a Précis of the Historical Points of Interest*, updated versions of which have been in use by our guides ever since.

In 1998, we greatly increased our public profile, and tours now appeared in the Festival Fringe brochure, so we became officially part of the Fringe rather than of the International Festival.

Originally tours started at Cannonball House and we had a base there, but things have changed over the years and we now operate from the City Chambers quadrangle right in

the heart of the Old Town and the Fringe. The last two years have been very challenging for the tourist and cultural sector in Edinburgh, as elsewhere. We were still able to provide some tours in 2020, despite there being no Festival, Fringe or Tattoo that year, thanks to volunteers from the membership, and in 2021, we provided a reduced programme. So we have been able to provide a service every year since 1947, which no-one else can say. One great advantage of the cancellation of the Tattoo was that the wonderful view from the Castle Esplanade was visible rather than being hidden by temporary seating. That will not be happening again.

In 1971 George Bruce in his book *'Festival in the North'*, described the EFVGA as providing tours with 'undeviating persistence', if this was true in 1971 it is even more true today.

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## AGM and New Guides

At the AGM held on 6 April in the Braid Bowling Club we were very pleased that Councillor Neil Ross, who has been a great support to the association recently, presented badges to four new guides, photos are shown below. Reading from left to right Neil Ross is presenting badges to Gail Joughin, Veni Vounatsu, Ivy Tao and John Masson.

Since then there have been two other new guides added to our ranks, Ailsa Gebbie (no photo of Ailsa unfortunately) and Ken Young, who is pictured at the bottom being presented with his badge by Laura McMurdo, the oldest Honorary Guide who was able to join us at the City Chambers.

Also pictured below is our longest-serving current guide, Gladys Bain, who first started guiding in 1982 while still a student, and who was presented with a bouquet to mark 40 years of guiding for the EFVGA.





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## Pearl Singers/He who must not be named

On June 8<sup>th</sup> we were asked to provide a custom tour for a large group (about 50) of students and staff from Pearl High School in Mississippi. They were a choir (the Pearl Singers) on a tour which had incorporated a concert in Glasgow the previous day, they had a concert in St Giles the day after, and then they were to travel south for a concert in the London area. They had specifically asked for Greyfriars Kirkyard and Victoria Street to be included. This was because there was some interest in the boy wizard who must not be named, but the main problem for us was that this arose in the context of the introduction by CEC of the quaintly-named Cemetery Tour Guide Operator Registration Scheme which means that access for Tour Groups to Greyfriars Kirkyard is restricted. (See below.) So a small group of guides revised their Harry Potter knowledge and took this group on the requested tour, which they seemed to enjoy. They then went on to St Cecilia's Hall, and gave their concert in St Giles the following day, which was actually very good and well-attended.

After due research on the rather flimsy claimed connections between some of the Harry Potter character names and gravestones in Greyfriars it seems to me that the only absolutely certain connection as far as names goes is the Maggie Smith character

Minerva McGonagall. There is only one person called McGonagall that anyone has ever heard of (note that the spelling is identical) and that was William and we all know about him and his dreadful verse. J K Rowling must have had him in mind when she named this character, and his memorial is in Greyfriars, just near the Heriot's Hospital entrance to the Kirkyard.

## Cemetery Tour Scheme

This is a scheme by which tour operators have to pay for permits to take groups into the main CEC owned cemeteries, namely Greyfriars, Canongate, Old and New Calton, and St Cuthbert's. While we can understand the reason for introducing such a scheme, the problem area is really Greyfriars, which suffers from over-large tour groups interested in the more sensationalist aspects of its history/folklore/literary association. We had made representations that we should not be subject to this scheme, because of our essentially voluntary nature, but no luck so far. So for the months of June and August we joined up and are officially entitled to take groups into any of these cemeteries, as long as we display the 'graveyard lanyard'. (These are available from the Co-ordinator).



These illustrated talks are free and open to members of the public.  
The talks will be held in the European Room of the City Chambers in the High Street.  
Each talk starts at 7.00pm

### Thursday 4th August

Scottish author, James Robertson, will give a talk titled  
"History, Memory and the Ghost of Major Weir"

### Wednesday 10th August

Dr Arran Johnston, Historian, writer and Heritage Consultant, will give a talk titled  
"The Fall of the House of Stuart: 75 years of crisis and conflict"

### Wednesday 17th August

Mike Lewis, Local Historian and Festival Guide, will give a talk titled:  
"75 years of the Edinburgh Festival"

### Tuesday 23rd August

Kate Stephenson, Historian and formerly of the NTS, will give a talk titled  
"Fashion and Functionality: the rise and Fall of Gladstones Land through the clothing of its residents"

### Wednesday 7th September

Eric Melvin, Local Historian and Festival Guide, will give a talk titled  
"The Visit of George IV - August 1822"

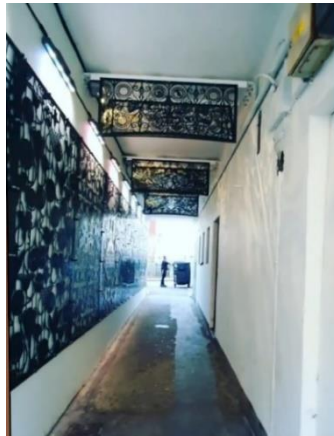
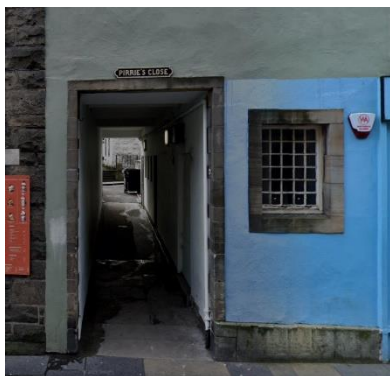
# Newsletter

## Royal Mile News

Edinburgh World Heritage has recently finished the first batch of its Twelve Closes Project. Edinburgh's closes, the narrow, often steep alleyways branching off from the Royal Mile, are an important characteristic of the Old Town, and a reminder of the city's medieval origins. However, they are often perceived as being unclean and unsafe, particularly at night. You can learn more about the project [here](#).

The project partnership between Edinburgh World Heritage and the City of Edinburgh Council, working with Edinburgh Napier University, has sought to tackle local problems such as anti-social behaviour through alternative forms of street lighting; brightening and enhancing the historic alleyways. Members of the local community have been involved in the design process. This first batch comprised Carrubber's Close, Chessel's Court, Stevenlaw's Close and Pirrie's Close (which links the western side of Chessel's Court to the Royal Mile). Stevenlaw's Close features the artwork "Birds in Flight", a lighting installation utilising light projected through a laser cut ceiling. Chessel's Court, these include a section of mirrored ceiling between the entry arches and new lighting on the underside of the arches themselves. This creates playful ambient lighting at night that reflects around the space, working in conjunction with the existing architecture. Carrubber's Close features gently shifting lighting that alters the shadows in the close, creating a feeling of procession that was highlighted by the congregation of Old Saint Paul's. The close also includes a new art installation by Edinburgh artist David Lemm which features geometric metal fittings that cast shadows into the close. Pirrie's Close includes a community-led art installation. The installation includes coloured lighting, and laser-cut wall and ceiling suspended panels forming a fretwork of geometric and naturalistic designs interpreting the lives of the residents. These two photos give an idea of the before and after effect.

The Twelve Closes Project is a long-term renewal and reinterpretation scheme which will continue to work with artists and communities over the coming years.



### Giraffes about Town

Just space for a little one, a giraffe in this case. Not just in the Old Town but all over the place. You can find out more about the giraffes [here](#). On Friday 1 July, over 40 eight-foot-tall giraffe sculptures hit the streets of Edinburgh, in partnership with Wild in Art. The aim of the trail is to help our city recover after the pandemic and raise vital funds for the RZSS wildlife conservation work. At the end of the trail, many of the sculptures will be auctioned at a special event at the National Museum of Scotland on Tuesday 4 October 2022 to raise much needed funds for wildlife conservation.

You will become familiar with this giraffe, called Mapping the City, as it is located just at our place of assembly in the City Chambers Courtyard. The artist is Victoria Rose Ball, and she, inspired by the twists and turns of the streets of Edinburgh and her love for creating things outwith the ordinary perspectives in the form of illustration, chose to focus on creating a map of the city on her giraffe.