



Newsletter

Autumn 2019

Summer 2019: Mixed results

The Association experienced mixed fortunes this summer. We ended our Open Streets tours on a strong note, with 15 customers attending the last of these in July. We also enjoyed a successful summer soirée in June. But the overall numbers for our main Festival season were down on last year, despite a few exceptionally good days.

Our Festival season started well. There were several days on which we received more than 25 visitors, and we finished the first week with our numbers holding up well compared to last year. Unfortunately, we then had several slots with just one or two clients, and one with no visitors at all. By the end of the season, the total visitor count was 453, down 19% on 2018.

We can't entirely blame the weather for this decline. It's true that we had some atrocious days when heavy rain kept the customers away. But there were also some wet days when the numbers were reasonably high, and conversely several sunny and dry days when we only attracted two or three visitors.

Trend

A definite trend that we noticed was that tourists are increasingly using on-line resources to plan their entire visits in advance, often before they leave home. Around 93% of our clients had decided in advance to join our tours. Clearly, we can no longer rely on attracting people who just happen to be passing the City Chambers. Such passers-by are unlikely to have a couple



of hours free for a tour at a few minutes notice.

This year we decided to allocate only two or three guides per slot, rather than four as previously. This resulted in a welcome drop in the number of times a guide had to go home without a tour: 32 this year compared to 43 in 2018.

Reviews

Customer satisfaction with our tours has been as high as ever. We received 18 reviews on TripAdvisor during or just after the Festival, all with a 5-star

rating and all with glowing praise for the guides. We also had some excellent feedback through our website and via emails. And on one notable occasion, a couple took the trouble to return to the City Chambers specifically to tell us how much they had enjoyed their tour the previous day and to ask us to pass on their praise to their guide.

Where they came from

Our visitors this year came from as far away as Brazil, China, India, Japan, Malaysia, South Africa and Turkey. Nearer home, our Scottish visitors included a group of nine who had travelled from Arbroath for the day specifically to join our tour. We also received a large group from Seattle who said that they had planned their entire visit to Edinburgh around their tour with us.

- You can find a detailed analysis of our 2019 visitor numbers in the Guides Only section of our website (see the box on page 4 for details).

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Open Streets to continue

The Committee has decided that we will continue to take part in the Open Streets project at least until the end of the year. These take place on the first Sunday of each month, when almost the whole of the Royal Mile and several adjoining streets are closed to vehicles. They provide a welcome opportunity for local people and tourists to enjoy a visit to the Old Town without having to dodge the traffic.

Since May, we have been taking advantage of Open Streets to offer a 'taster' version of our free tours. We have so far run these tours on



three Sundays, and have welcomed a total of 31 visitors. The tours start from the City Chambers and last 50 minutes each. As well as receiving good feedback from our clients, the tours have proved popular with the guides, who clearly prefer a relatively quiet traffic-free Royal Mile to the crowds and noise of the Fringe.

Now that Edinburgh has become a year-round tourist destination, there is a good case for continuing with this offering throughout the winter. To do so, we will need to organise a rota, so look out for email requests for guides over the coming weeks.

SUMMER SOIRÉE

Despite heavy rain and flash floods in parts of the city, around thirty guides managed to get to the Botanic Cottage for our summer soirée in June. This is the second time we have held our annual social event in this interesting building, which is located within the Botanic Garden at Inverleith. The event provided a welcome opportunity for us all to meet and socialise with our fellow guides.

A highlight of the evening was an entertaining quiz on Edinburgh and Scottish history, put together by Christine Stevenson. The questions were challenging, but the contestants, working in teams, rose to the occasion.



Thanks to Christine for arranging the quiz, and also to the several members of the Committee who organised the drinks, food and venue for the successful evening.



Another successful event this summer was a demonstration walk in parts of the Old Town and New Town, devised and led by Eric Melvin. Starting at the City Chambers and ending in St. Andrew Square, the walk was aimed at guides interested in taking tours away from the crowds and noise of the Royal Mile. Eric has provided extensive notes on the route, and these are now available in the Guides Only section of our website (follow the link to 'Hints and Tips').

GUIDE NEWS



Two new guides joined our team this year, just in time for the Festival guiding season. **Graham Sutherland** (left) is a native of Inverness who has lived in Edinburgh since his student days. A former teacher of history and modern studies, he lists choral singing, classical music, cycling and photography among his interests.

Calum MacLeod (below left), a local authority housing officer, is a life-long Edinburgh resident. He writes, 'I've moved about a lot within the city. Possibly my most interesting residence was New Skinners Close, off Blackfriars Street. Many tours, including those from the EFVGA, passed my front door. I think this is when I first thought about being a tour guide myself. Less welcome were the ghost tours who thought that 10.45 pm was the ideal time to give their groups a fright. This was right outside my house. On one occasion a neighbour poured a bucket of water over the perpetrator just as he was about to spring his trap. The laughs from the group and scream from the guide were a welcome change.'



Following her move to Glasgow, **Barbara Drummond** has stepped down as an active guide and has joined the ranks of honorary guides. She started guiding with us in 2007.

Murray Carmichael has also become an honorary guide. He qualified as a guide in 2008 and served on the Committee for several years. He was instrumental in organising tours for the Clan Carmichael gathering in Edinburgh in 2017.

Sadly, we must also report two deaths. **Peter Chalmers** passed away in July at the age of 90. He was an active guide for 18 years before retiring in 2013. He also served as EFVGA Secretary for several years. **Archie Fleming** died in August after a long guiding career. He joined us in 1993, but was obliged to stand down in 2012 because of failing eyesight.



2020 FESTIVAL DATES

Science Festival	4 - 19 April	Tattoo	7 - 29 August
Film Festival	17 - 28 June	International Festival and Fringe	7 - 31 August
Jazz & Blues Festival	17 - 26 July		
Art Festival	30 July - 30 August	Book Festival	15 - 31 August

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Royal Mile Unveilings



Scaffolding has recently been removed from two sites on the Royal Mile. At the beginning of August, an extensive refurbishment project at the Canongate

Kirk was completed. The work included essential roof repairs and weatherproofing as well as repainting the external walls.

The dismantling of the scaffolding, which coincided with the start of our Festival guiding season, revealed the impressive re-gilding of the royal coat of arms over the main door (photo, above). This intricate work was carried out by a local firm of painters and decorators, working to standards laid down by the Court of the Lord Lyon. The stag's head and antlers, which were a gift from George VI, have also been renovated.

Our photo below shows the final pieces of scaffolding being removed from another site undergoing restoration: the buildings at the west end of the Abbey Strand. This work involved the harling and drying out of the buildings' exterior walls in preparation for their conversion to a learning centre for the Palace of Holyroodhouse and the Royal Collection. The learning centre will occupy the ground and first floors of the building. The upper floors will be used for holiday flats.



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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tripadvisor.co.uk and search for
EFVGA.