



# Old Town Newsletter

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for a living city

Autumn 2011

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## OLD TOWN GARDENS – NEW BOOK

Sixteen gardens and related sites in the Old Town are featured in a new book published by Jean Bareham of Greenyonder Tours. From the aristocratic 17th century Canongate gardens to the children's gardens inspired by Patrick Geddes, the book describes people's changing use of the green space. 'Hidden Gardens of the Royal Mile' will be launched at the Radical Book Fair on Thursday 27th October, 7.30 - 8.30 pm, at 'Out of the Blue', 36 Dalmeny Street, Edinburgh EH6 8RG. All are welcome.

## An important building with great potential: the verdict on Canongate Venture

The Edinburgh Old Town Development Trust has just completed a study into the architectural and historic significance of the former North Canongate Infants School on New Street (now known as the Canongate Venture). The study has considerably enlarged our understanding of the significance of this building, which was slated for demolition as part of the 'Caltongate' project.



Photograph: John Falach

The former North Canongate Infants School, New Street

Commissioned as part of the overall feasibility study for a new literature centre (see story on p. 3) the work was carried out by Adam Dudley Architects and also included an assessment of the building's structural condition. The work was funded by a grant from the Edinburgh World Heritage Trust.

The building's architect was almost certainly not Robert Wilson, the Edinburgh School Board's architect, as previously thought, but Wilson's assistant and successor John Carfrae. The school was completed in 1901, the year of Wilson's death. Many prominent figures

were associated with the school's history, including Patrick Geddes who commissioned a painting for the school from Stanley Cursiter. The installation of the picture caused such a controversy in *The Scotsman* that the picture had to be removed, and Geddes' whole scheme abandoned. Cursiter's picture now hangs in the Canongate Kirk.

In 1913 Abdul Baha, the leader of the Baha'i faith and an acquaintance of Geddes visited the school and was impressed by the dedication of the teachers and the food provided for pupils. The appalling poverty of the area at that time was underlined >>>

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by Mr A. Young, for 40 years Headmaster of the school, in his maiden speech to the House of Commons in 1924.

*“...under the investigation made by the government in 1901 on the physical training of children, the facts that were found were so appalling that there was later a Commission set up to inquire into the degeneracy of the people... and out of these two Commissions sprang that wonderful child's charter, the [Education] Act of 1908.”*

The school is therefore not only embedded in the social history of the Canongate, but had a pivotal role in the evolution of national education policy.

Adam Dudley Architects found that the building was in good condition, with only superficial damage to the external stonework, and other general minor problems resulting from the lack of maintenance over the last few years. The study also shows that some simple energy saving measures such as insulating the walls and adding secondary glazing to windows would substantially reduce future running costs. They are confident that the school's design allows flexibility for a variety of possible uses, already demonstrated by its life history - a school followed by a vegetable market, building trades college and latterly as the Canongate Venture, housing workshops and offices. A community arts centre focussing on the written and spoken word next?



Inside the Canongate Venture

## Making the Old Town greener



Photograph: John Releach

An Old Town green space – the garden revived by the Mushroom Trust in Dunbar's Close

The Trust is developing green spaces within the Old Town through the Patrick Geddes Gardening Club – named in honour of the innovative gardener, biologist, Old Town resident and urban planner. The Club is currently working in the secluded garden of Acheson House, a 17th century townhouse on the Canongate. A midden for 20 or more years, the garden has been unloved and uncared for, and was overgrown and full of rubbish.

Working with the City of Edinburgh Council (who own the property), and the Edinburgh World Heritage Trust, we are in the process of laying it out as a garden again, inspired by the 17th Century and growing some of the fruits, vegetables and herbs that may have been grown in a kitchen garden at that time. Trust Board member Cat Grant says “We also want it to become a social space for the community and a place where we can learn to garden, prune trees and make compost.

We are also looking after the flower beds at Canongate Kirk, planting perennial herbs such as rosemary and sage, and perhaps even a couple of Victoria Plums. This should attract bees, butterflies and other beasts and also become an edible garden.”

The Patrick Geddes Gardening Club has received funding from the Co-operative Community Fund and Comic Relief to develop the Club and to buy tools and plants. The Club works in partnership with many different people and organisations including the Museum of Edinburgh, City Centre Neighbourhood Partnership, Edinburgh World Heritage Trust, Edinburgh's Larder, Canongate Kirk, Greenyonder Tours and Bridgend Allotments Community project.

We would love to hear from people with landscape design and growing or gardening experience who would like to take part in this project. Email Cat Grant - [piggclub@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:piggclub@yahoo.co.uk)

### NEW ARTS PROGRAMMES FOR THE OLD TOWN

Edinburgh Old Town Development Trust is teaming up with local organisations to provide more cultural activities for residents in the Old Town. Schools' projects are at the planning stage and an all-age dance programme is on its way. Information will be posted on the Trust website over the coming weeks, but get in touch if you want advance information.

### LOTTERY WIN FOR GREYFRIARS COMMUNITY PROJECT

Good news for Greyfriars Tolbooth & Highland Kirk which has been awarded £709,882 by the Big Lottery. This, and £150,000 also received from the Robertson Trust, will enable the Grassmarket Community Project to complete their new building and expand their services to homeless people and other vulnerable adults.

### NEW CITY CENTRE YOUTH FORUM

A new city centre Youth Forum is being launched and youth workers at South Bridge Resource Centre, Infirmary Street want to hear from young people who live in the area. If you are aged between 13 and 18 and would like your voice heard contact Leila Coward or Nancy Somerville on 0131 558 3545 or email [leila.coward@ae.sch.gov.uk](mailto:leila.coward@ae.sch.gov.uk)

# Edinburgh's Old Town – why should we care about its development?



Photograph: John Reaich

Whose Old Town?

For 1500 years or more the 'old town' of Edinburgh's rich mixture of wealthy and poor, houses, workshops, markets, gardens and inns defined Scottish life and culture. Despite some depopulation and the disappearance of much of this variety, its quirky combination of architecture, atmosphere and people remains a magnet for the millions who visit Edinburgh every year.

But there is a sense that the endless expansion of tourist shops, party flats and eateries largely serving the visitor is eroding what remains of the rich diversity of the old town and gradually destroying it as a place to live in. The appearance in 2005 of a massive plan for hotel, offices, apartments and shops just north of the Canongate,

and out of scale with the character and fabric of the old town, galvanised people to propose an alternative future for the Old Town. The Canongate Community Forum (working under the acronym SOOT – Save Our Old Town) campaigned against the scheme and also researched economic and social needs in the old town. Their conclusion was that to maintain the old town as a place to live in, there was a need for more affordable and family housing, more premises for start-ups and independent businesses, and for more green spaces. In 2009 the Edinburgh Old Town Development Trust emerged from this campaign as a community-owned body to work towards some of these developments and to promote the old town as a good place to live.

## The Edinburgh Old Town Development Trust has four main aims:

- 1 To provide a vehicle for community-led development of Edinburgh Old Town that meets identified community needs, through encouraging the involvement of local residents in planning and implementing specific initiatives.**
- 2 To work towards a low carbon, sustainable, urban community.**
- 3 To preserve the diverse culture and historic integrity of Edinburgh's Old Town.**
- 4 To work with other organisations to create a healthy, balanced and sustainable urban economy, which supports its residential community effectively and provides an appropriate range of employment opportunities for Edinburgh residents.**

For more information on the Trust, its background and its aims, go to [www.eotdt.org](http://www.eotdt.org)

## The Word on the Street

With support from the Scottish Community Foundation, Edinburgh World Heritage and the RIAS Scottish Community Projects Fund, Edinburgh Old Town Development Trust is carrying out a feasibility study into its proposal for a Literature and Literacy Centre based in the disused Canongate Venture building in New Street. The proposal is both about restoring pride to the community and about providing opportunities for local people to take an active part in the literary arts, not just as consumers but as practitioners.

The Trust believes that the arts can be a powerful force in community development as well as a sound economic investment - providing education, training and employment and business opportunities in the Old Town. Such a centre could be a start-up site for small or new businesses as well as a vehicle to unleash the creative potential of children, young people and the adult and elderly population.

The study is in two parts. The first part, a conservation study of the Canongate Venture building itself is now complete (see p. 1). The second part will provide an assessment of the business case for such a centre in the Canongate, looking at the various strands of the proposed business, the local context and potential partners, funding and income prospects and operational structures. The report is expected by the end of October 2011.

### LOCAL HISTORY, YOUR HISTORY

Have you a story to tell about your life, or your family's life, in the Old Town, and photographs to go with it? If so, we would like to hear from you. Contributions will be put on our website but may end up being published in book form at some point in the future.

# Diverse, balanced, mixed and exemplary

Like all cities, the Old Town of Edinburgh is liable to on-going change and development, but what kind of change, and who should be involved in shaping that change? The Trust has drafted criteria for development in the Old Town.

## 1 The Old Town is a **DIVERSE** neighbourhood, not a museum

A fine-grained diversity of building uses is essential. Both the historic fabric and new development should be occupied with homes, businesses, shops and leisure uses, existing side-by-side with civic buildings and landmarks, and a rich, mixed and stable resident population and workforce.

## 2 **BALANCE** between city promotion and local residents is needed

Currently the Old Town is exploited for tourism and leisure uses for the benefit of the city as a whole, without a balancing consideration for the needs of residents. A residential community can only be stable if it has the facilities it needs – local shops and services, some accessible pockets of greenery in the densely built-up area.

## 3 A stable and **MIXED** residential community is vital

There is a need to increase the range and quality of affordable housing. Affordable family housing should be prioritised, as should rental accommodation. Only developments which demonstrate they are adding to the neighbourhood mix should be permitted.

## 4 **EXEMPLARY** & ambitious developments and buildings

Any development must exemplify the City Council's aspiration to be the 'most sustainable small city in northern Europe', aiming to reduce reliance on consumption and continued resource depletion. The Old Town provides an inspiring setting which could form an exemplary European model for the future redevelopment of existing urban areas.



Photograph: John Releach

High School Yards Nursery, now a development opportunity

## What is a Development Trust?

There are over 140 development trusts in Scotland (and many more in the rest of the UK), all set up to give their community a bigger stake in the future of that community, through ownership or management of an asset, or through committing themselves to a pro-active role in the overall health and development of their place.

### Development trusts are community organisations which:

- are owned and managed by the local community
- aim to achieve the sustainable regeneration of a community or address a range of economic, social, environmental and cultural issues within a community
- are independent but seek to work in partnership with other private, public and third sector organisations
- aim to reduce dependency on grant support by generating income through enterprise and the ownership of assets. All trading surpluses are principally reinvested in the organisation or the community

The Edinburgh Old Town Development Trust is a provisional member of the Development Trusts Association Scotland, which supports the work of the development trusts in Scotland. For further information about development trusts see [www.dtascot.org.uk](http://www.dtascot.org.uk)

For more on all of these stories, to download a pdf of this newsletter, and find further information on the Trust, its background and its aims, go to [www.eotdt.org](http://www.eotdt.org)

## Can you help?

### Yes, I would like to help by:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Getting involved in a project - please circle one or more:<br>Gardening   Food   Arts   Education<br>Publishing   Local History   Surveys | <input type="checkbox"/> Doing some paperwork/administration<br><input type="checkbox"/> Helping with the website/communications<br><input type="checkbox"/> Becoming a member (£2 per year) |
|--|--|

Name:

Address:

Telephone:

Email:

Postcode:

### Please return this form to:

EOTDT c/o Hillcrest Housing Association, 126 Canongate, Edinburgh EH8 8DD  
or EOTDT c/o 41 Grassmarket, Edinburgh EH1 2HS

## Who are we?

The EOTDT is governed by a Board of voluntary Directors made up of residents and representatives from local organisations – Sean Bradley (Chair), Jim Johnson, Catriona Grant, Margaret Baxter, Gill Binnie (Hillcrest Housing Association), Josiah Lockhart (Grassmarket Community Project), Neil Simpson, Andrew Guest.