

West Blacket Association & Neighbourhood Watch

Newsletter November 2009

Annual General Meeting

The West Blacket Association AGM will be held on Monday November 23rd at The Minto Hotel, Minto Street. All residents welcome. Invitations have been extended to all four Councillors in the Southside/Newington ward, and to Community Police Officers, though it is unlikely all will be able to attend.

730pm Refreshments and membership renewals (tea/coffee provided)

800pm Officer Bearers' reports
Election of Officers & Committee

815pm Local History Group & Neighbourhood Watch reports

830pm **Energy Saving in a Conservation Area**

Presentation by Ben Tindall, Conservation Architect
www.benjamintindallarchitects.co.uk

900pm Informal Discussion (cash bar available)

930pm Close

Treasurer's Report 2008-9

Our membership stands this year at 34 households (some 62 members). Subscription income was £96. This summer we received a donation of £400 from Capricorn Films for their use of Middleby Street as a location. Expenses for our very successful Summer Party were close to £310. We continued our subscription to the Cockburn Association. Our other expenses this year were for printing our Newsletter and for stationery.

I anticipate a surplus of around £100 for the year. Total bank and cash balances will be close to £710. Full details will be available at the AGM or to members on request.

Membership

Subscriptions for the year to November 2010 remain at £2/individual or £3/household and may be paid at the AGM or, if you are unable to attend, to Evelynne Hill. If you wish to pay your subscription by cheque, please make this payable to West Blacket Association.

We are considering increasing the subscription, after many years, and making it possible to pay by annual standing order. However, until this is possible, please return the attached slip to Evelynne Hill, WBA Treasurer, 37 Upper Gray Street.

About the West Blacket Association

The Upper Gray Street Association was set up in 1966 to object to the proposed demolition of a Georgian villa at what was then 20, now 22, Upper Gray Street. The association subsequently expanded, as the West Blacket Association, to become the community association for the part of the Blacket Conservation Area not 'within the gates' and therefore not represented by the Blacket Association. The two associations are distinct though often confused.

We have prepared a welcome leaflet for new residents, explaining the objectives of the West Blacket Association, and with other useful information. This can be found on our website www.westblacket.org.uk : if you do not have internet access, printed copies are available on request.

Grange/Prestonfield Community Council

There are many differences between the GPCC and the WBA, but they should be able to work together. The GPCC is a statutory body with some funding from the City Council, and its area includes around 8000 households – consulting all residents in such a large area is a major operation. The WBA is a voluntary association representing an area of around 280 households, and so much easier to consult and inform, but has representation on the GPCC.

Elections for the new GPCC were advertised and Mike Hunter has been re-elected as WBA representative for 2009-12. See the website, www.grangeprestonfieldCC.org.uk, which has details of meeting dates & minutes, contact addresses and a discussion forum.

Planning

This year has seen the implementation of Scottish Government proposals to simplify and streamline the Planning process, and to modernise the liquor Licensing regime. In both these areas of control the administration is undertaken at the local authority level, although Licensing Boards are independent from the local authority, but is operated within the legislative process introduced by the Scottish Government. At its simplest the aim of changes to Planning procedures is to have more planning applications handled without referral to councillors, but other simplifications of planning requirements do not apply in Conservation Areas where tighter controls continue to be applied in order to protect the amenity and character from inappropriate change.

In the case of Licensing changes the new regime came into operation from September 2009 and effectively places more responsibility on licensees and managers to ensure compliance with the legislation and to avoid their premises causing any disturbance. Time has to be allowed for these changes to take effect but there are now Licensing Standard Officers and Environmental Wardens available who will be monitoring the situation and responding to complaints from neighbouring residents.

Elections to The West Blacket Association Committee

Nominations for the offices of Chairman, Hon Treasurer and Hon Secretary are cordially invited: these should be sent to the current Secretary, with confirmation of the nominee's agreement to stand for election at the Annual General Meeting.

The West Blacket Association, as ever, welcomes new blood, new ideas & new enthusiasm. Most of the work is done by the Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary. Other committee members need only commit to one or two hours on a week-night evening, at intervals of 6 to 10 weeks, depending on the pressure of business. If you are interested, please get in touch with any member of the current committee, or just turn up to the AGM.

Our constitution does not currently provide for the Committee to co-opt additional members. This could be amended at a future AGM, but at present you must stand for election at the AGM.

The WBA Officers & Committee for 2008-9 are:

Chairman: Brian Charlesworth has left the area and is not standing for re-election

Hon Secretary: Mike Hunter, 40 Upper Gray Street. 667 1767
dr.m.j.hunter@gmail.com.

Hon Treasurer: Evelynne Hill, 37 Upper Gray Street. 667 0675.

Neighbourhood Watch: Jane Griffiths, Kate O'Brien

Other Members:

Irene Brown, 32 Minto Street

Ian Carter, 3 Bartholomew House, 12 Duncan Street

Alice Foster, 18 Upper Gray Street

Rosemary Wake, 9b Middleby Street

Neighbourhood Watch in West Blacket

The Neighbourhood Watch was set up more than ten years ago, by very enthusiastic individual residents with extensive support from Lothian & Borders Police, but then quite separate from the West Blacket Association. This arrangement involving some duplication of resources, the Watch was later incorporated into the WBA, with representation on the WBA Committee. Members believe there is still a need to alert people to crimes being carried out in the area and to encourage watchfulness generally. And of course some insurers offer lower premiums in NHW areas.

There are now 26 addresses on the email network of local residents who receive monthly police newsletters and occasionally immediate alerts about criminal activities in the area. Interest was stimulated by the June party, for which the police supplied information, and also by increased incidence of housebreaking and car vandalism. Newsletters were regular for most of the year, with a falling off in the past 3 months because of a staff secondment from the community policing section.

Kate O'Brien and Jane Griffiths share circulation of newsletters etc on alternating months, and would be pleased to add any other names to the network (griffdj@griffiths12.org.uk ; Kate.O'Brien@hotmail.co.uk).

Summer Party

Thanks to the generous hospitality of Kate & Nigel, and financial support from Capricorn Films, the West Blacket Association was able to invite all residents to a memorable event at 9 Minto Street. Fortunately, the weather held and we were able to enjoy the garden as well as the house.

The purpose of the event was to encourage membership of the Association, and to advertise its Neighborhood Watch network and Local History Group.

The event was a great success, attended by -

Existing members: 16 households, including 24 adults & 7 children.

New members: 2 households, including 3 adults and 2 children.

Non-members: 14 households, including 21 adults and 8 children.

We had hoped for more new members, but maybe they will come forward? We intend to organise another social event in the near future, but this is likely to be for members only.

Snow waits for one woman

A heavy snowfall in west Middleby Street scheduled for mid April had to be postponed to end of June, due to the indisposition of a German film star. No. 10 had been selected by Capricorn Films (UK partner of a German film company) as the scene of a happy Christmas party which deflected the glamorous security guard tracking down thieves of a deadly virus. The film Whiteout (not the Antarctic Kate Beckinsale now showing) is for Germany at Christmas and was mainly filmed in a snow covered Abbotsford House, Galashiels, but 10 Middleby Street was deemed sufficiently stately for this small scene - 2 minutes at most, although about 7 hours in the making.

Full bloom of trees & plants defeated plans to bury the gardens in snow, and on the night a violent snowstorm erupted from cans for 5 hours, No 10 was bedecked with tinsel and bright lights, No 12 added "public lavatory" to its historical functions of school and laundry, the glamorous lady drew up in a glamorous sports car 35 times, a large crowd gathered to watch, a large crew scurried around with cameras etc - and the West Blacket Association benefited by £400 for the inconvenience caused to residents.

West Blacket Local History Group

The group has held two meetings this year, in January and most recently in October. We meet in members' houses, each session beginning with a short account of episodes in the history of the hosts' home. This year's meetings were in Minto Street and Middleby Street, in houses which, probably unusually, exemplify the appealingly mixed nature of the West Blacket area. One house served as the base for a doctor's surgery, having been one hundred years before the home of one of Edinburgh's Lord Provosts. The other had doubled as home and business, having been (at different times) a school and a laundry. Otherwise, the focus of the group was on shops in the area and on neighbours' responses to the expansion of Bartholomews along Middleby Street over 50 years. The website has also been updated with lots more information on 'notable residents' and on Minto Street.

To prowl through our past, visit <http://www.westblacket.org.uk/history.htm>

To join the group, contact: Rosemary Wake (0131 662 4221; erwake@btinternet.com)
or Ron Hill (0131 667 0675; r.g.hill@talk21.com)