

West Blacket Association

NEWSLETTER AUTUMN 2017

Annual General Meeting

Monday, November 27th 2017
Old Bell (upstairs room), Causewayside

All Residents Welcome

730pm

Welcome (refreshments provided from 700pm)
Chairman's and Treasurer's reports
Election of Office bearers and committee

800pm

Prof Mathew Williams,
Global Change Research Institute,
School of GeoSciences,
University of Edinburgh



Present committee members are: Maggie Stevenson (Chair), Nigel Cumming (Treasurer), Mike Hunter (Hon Sec), Kate O'Brien (Membership Secretary), Ian Carter, Alice Foster, Richard Grant, Evelynne Hill, Rosemary Wake, Charles Warlow.

The Office Bearers are willing to continue, but Richard Grant does not wish to remain as a member of the committee.

Nominations to the committee. All WBA members are eligible to stand for election and new members are very welcome. Nominations in writing please to Mike Hunter, Hon Sec, 40 Upper Gray Street, or by email to dr.m.j.hunter@gmail.com.

For more information see our website: www.westblacket.org.uk

Who are we?

The WBA is an amenity association for part of the Blacket Conservation Area, from Salisbury Place to West Mayfield and from Upper and South Gray Streets to Minto Street. Our main purpose is the preservation and improvement of the general amenity of the West Blacket area. This includes consultation with the Council on their plans for parking, traffic and recycling, and on Planning Applications under consideration. We also hope to encourage good neighbour relations through Neighbourhood Watch and by organising some social events for our members. If you are not already a member, please join us.

Planning Matters

There has unfortunately been very little activity during the past year on the important corner site at **the junction of Duncan Street and Upper Gray Street**, despite planning approval having been granted in June 2016 for two terraced houses on Duncan Street and a cottage on Upper Gray Street. Although demolition of the former buildings on the site was completed prior to last year's AGM, and some exploratory foundation excavations were made, the plot has subsequently become overgrown with weeds. The good weather opportunity has now passed for this year and even if the Building Warrant application lodged in May is approved soon it would seem unlikely for there to be action before the Spring. The delay in moving forward could well be attributable to a Planning Department manpower shortage at the Council but we may never know.

On the edges of the West Blacket area the student flats development on the site of the former Paramount Printers on Causewayside seems now to be in active use although it was barely finished at the start of the Autumn term. On Minto Street there was a long period with the **Minto Hotel site** being advertised for sale. That changed recently & activity has now commenced on the conversion of the Hotel to residential use, with demolition of the function suite and reception area link-building having taken place. The developers have also been in contact with neighbouring residents about further planned activity.

The other prospective development proposal - the **Hendry & Macdonald** workshop at 20 Duncan Street - has rumbled on again during the year. The Appeal against refusal by the Council of permission to demolish the workshop was eventually rejected by the Government Reporter appointed to review the matter. Following the Listing of the building by Historic Environment Scotland (HES) there was a further planning application for conversion to student accommodation, the details & scale of which were very similar to earlier proposals. After long consideration of this the Council also refused that application. However in recent weeks an approach has been made to the Grange Prestonfield Community Council for an opportunity to make a presentation, presumably of an amended proposal but for which no details have as yet been provided. The presentation is likely to take place in November. We will have to give any new proposal due consideration once we have details.

Summer Walks

This year we held another varied programme of summer walks. All were well attended and we were glad to welcome some new members. In May we walked up the Esk from Musselburgh and had a delightful visit to Shepherd House Garden, Inveresk – a massive inspiration to our many gardening members! Our next outing followed the old Caledonian Railway line from Roseburn to Leith, past the remnants of some of its long-forgotten stations, showing us a different view of the city. The excellent cafe at Edinburgh Sculpture Studio was a welcome stopping off point towards the end of the walk.

A local evening walk in July took us past some hidden corners of the Southside to the Canongate. On our way, a young Canadian visitor joined us and seemed to enjoy the experience.

The last walk of the summer followed the Portobello Heritage Trail where we enjoyed seeing the great variety of buildings at Edinburgh's seaside resort. We came across pottery kilns and workers' houses, many elegant homes and churches and no fewer than 3 Town Halls. Some of our group also took advantage of joining the 'Porty Art Walk'.



Benjamin Bell's grave: Canongate Kirkyard

It was good to walk with our West Blacket neighbours and to enjoy their company.

WBA History Group

One thing many of us have valued is our area's mix of residential and commercial.

This is changing as business premises are replaced by housing. Or soon may be, in the case of the Duncan and Upper Gray Streets corner. Still unbuilt on despite planning consent, this site was one focus of the meeting in February. Ron Hill gave a short history of its use, referring to old maps and directories. Taking us to more recent times he covered its 1970s association with floral artist, Lilian Martin and ceramicist, Neil Read, both one-time residents of Upper Gray Street.

Change in the balance made it an especial pleasure to welcome Maxine and Allan Dundas of Scott and Brown, builders and stone-masonry specialists, one of the few businesses left in the area. Maxine, an enthusiastic historian, talked about the history of the firm which started in 1890, moving to West Blacket in the 1920s, where it took over the yard from Adam Currie, one of Edinburgh's leading joiners and a city councillor. We were then able to ask Allan's advice on the challenges of maintaining the fabric of our buildings.

All in all, another convivial and informative evening, generously accommodated, once again, by the Maclarens.