

West Blacket Association

NEWSLETTER AUTUMN 2021

Four Seasons In West Blacket



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.

During lockdown from March 2020, and varying restrictions since, we have continued to function with appropriate social distancing. Committee meetings have been held by Zoom, allowing us to monitor, discuss and comment on Planning matters. Now that many restrictions have been lifted, we have considered the safety of recommencing some social events, at least for those fully vaccinated and not especially vulnerable.

“WBA neighbours help 2020” WhatsApp Group

The primary purpose of this WhatsApp group is **'to exchange practical information, offer or receive help among local residents'**. Since it was set up early in the pandemic it has gained more members than belong to the West Blacket Association.

At the beginning, the group provided essential support for those unable to leave home because of age, vulnerability or suspected Covid symptoms, including advice on how to get online grocery deliveries. For those of us with gardens, the good weather was an opportunity to catch up: garden centres weren't open but online orders from as far away as West Lothian were shared. For others, jigsaws, books and toys were exchanged (after quarantine as it was then thought surface transmission of the virus was more significant).

The group has evolved to include, in the month up to Christmas 2020 alone: lost/missing bins; toy exchanges; advice on tradesmen; delivery scams; low water pressure; staying in Level 3; gritting roads; GP surgeries; Christmas greetings; gaelic lessons.

In Jan/Feb this year, information was shared on appointments for Covid vaccination (who, where, when & how). A metal detector was urgently required to recover a postie's keys lost in the snow. The City Council's “Spaces for People” initiative (eg new cycle lanes and road markings in Minto Street) was welcomed by some and not others. Fortunately, members of our WhatsApp group have commendably avoided escalating such differences of opinion; the City Council's Facebook page on Spaces for People is overwhelmed by toxic comments.

There isn't space here to describe the continuing evolution of our WhatsApp group during the rest of the year, over which we have only limited control, but thanks to all for contributing in a good spirit.

As a footnote, the WBA History Group, which previously communicated through an email distribution list, has now re-invented itself as West Blacket Historicals on WhatsApp.

Planning Matters

This could almost be a reprint of last year's report as there has been little significant change, particularly with the corner site at Duncan Street and Upper Gray Street. The only activity here has been the occasional weeding of the plot and regular disruption & a general deterioration in the state of the temporary boundary fence and barriers. As far as can be established the site would appear still to be owned by Seton Castle New Build Developments Ltd but records lodged at Companies House continue to be minimal.

Activity at the former Hendry and Macdonald workshop has however carried on steadily throughout the year, involving dismantling & reconstruction of some of the perimeter walls, and the roof is currently being rebuilt.

The Thrums Hotel at 14-15 Minto Street has as yet seen no construction activity following approval for a separate 10-bedroom building within the current car park area and subsequent refusal of a proposal to modify this into a 15-bedroom wing in the same location. Appeals to both the Council and Government have been lodged in relation to the latest refusal.

Another contentious site, but outside the WBA area, was for the formation of additional accommodation within the roof area above 1 East Mayfield (the north end of an attractive & Listed terrace on Mayfield Gardens). This was initially for an additional floor to the top flat by altering the roof profile, and subsequently to form a separate flat within the same space. These proposals were refused and appeals to both the Council and Government Reporters have also been rejected.

History Group Report

One positive of Covid restrictions is that many are now used to virtual chitchat. The success of the WBA's Neighbourhood WhatsApp encouraged the setting up of one for the history group.

West Blacket Historicals is dedicated to sharing and seeking history-related stuff (information I would have said but recently it enabled a redundant but original old Edinburgh pull handle to find a new home). We hope that the long evenings ahead will encourage members to dabble in the history of our area/ houses/ folk and, hint, hint, add to the common treasure chest.

It is a great disappointment that it has not been possible to hold the annual meeting with its social and historical exchanges but plans are pencilled in (with fingers crossed) for spring 2022. We'd welcome ideas about topics and/or formats for future meetings so that we can leap into a more social future when we can (email to Rosemary Wake: erwake@btinternet.com). In the meantime, thought is being given to devising short local history walks which could be used by individuals, including new residents, to explore our area. Ideal also for adhoc group walks! Again, suggestions welcome (email to r.g.hill@talk21.com).

We still want to update the history section on the WBA website but structural work is needed first. The site attracts visitors from well beyond Edinburgh. This year brought us a copy of a Newington Academy school prize awarded in 1866. The donor, in Ireland, was looking for a suitable resting place for the book as she disposed of her late husband's library.

WEST BLACKET ASSOCIATION – Please join to support your local area

New members welcome

Subscriptions are annual, until 31st October each year.

£8 for a household or £5 for an individual.

Please pay by Bank transfer or Standing order.

WBA bank details are: Sort Code **83-19-19**; A/C No **10056031**:

Once you've joined, just send your name, postal and email address to kate.obrien@hotmail.co.uk to let Kate, our Membership Secretary, know.

By giving us your email address, WBA will let you know about amenity issues, including planning, Neighbourhood Watch and any social activities we organise, eg History Group meetings, walks or visits of interest.

If you are already a member, no action is required.

Annual General Meeting November 29th 2021

The West Blacket Association AGM will be held at the New Bell (upstairs room), Causewayside, beginning 700pm.

The formal agenda, as required by our articles of association, will consist of:

Record of those attending

Minute of previous AGM

Chair's Report

Treasurer's Report

Election of Office Bearers and Committee

There will also be an opportunity to discuss matters of WBA interest.

Present committee members are: Maggie Stevenson (Chair), Nigel Cumming (Treasurer), Mike Hunter (Hon Sec), Kate O'Brien (Membership Secretary), Ian Carter, Lucy Charrington, Alice Foster, Evelynne Hill, Lise Morel, Charles Warlow & Cathie Wright.

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