

# Spurtle



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No 240

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**BROUGHTON'S INDEPENDENT STIRRER** Free

## SCHOOL PLAN FOR OLD ROYAL HIGH

St Mary's Music School is stepping forward with a surprise bid to expand its operations in whole or in part into the former Royal High School (RHS) on Regent Road.

A new charity, the Royal High School Preservation Trust (RHSPT), aims to take over the RHS and sublease it to St Mary's. Its plan could become a reality if an alternative scheme to redevelop and refurbish the site as a 6-star hotel does not win planning permission (see Issues 238-39). We expect those hotel plans to be submitted this summer.

Local resident Carol Colburn Grigor is key to the proposal. A philanthropist and concert pianist, she is also an influential trustee of the Dunard Fund which has a record of astonishingly munificent support for Arts initiatives across Edinburgh.

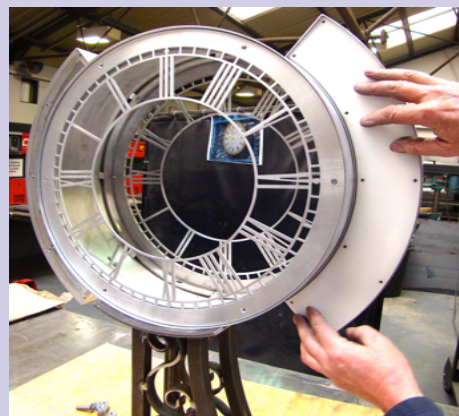
Informed sources tell us elements within City of Edinburgh Council privately welcome the news. Their unease about the wisdom of earlier decision making in this case has grown since the New Year. So has political alarm at the hostile, vocal and coordinated opposition of influential heritage representatives to the hotel scheme.

*Spurtle* exclusively broke the story about St Mary's online on 15 April and followed up with the official press release on 23 April. So far, readers across the city, Scotland and abroad have responded with unanimous support for keeping the RHS as an educational establishment.

RHSPT's chair William Gray Muir will present plans after the New Town & Broughton Community Council AGM on 11 May (see page 4).



## WELCOME HOME TO FAMILIAR FACE



Many people felt sad when James Ritchie & Son (Clockmakers) left 56 Broughton Street back in 2008 after 45 years. It wasn't just the loss of the business (if only around the corner to Dundas Street), but also of the characterful clock which hung outside.

The property's new occupier Fred Berkmitter also felt the pang, and now, after mulling it over at snail's pace for seven years, has commissioned a replacement in the same style to hang outside L'Escargot Bleu. Ritchie's Alan Smith began work on it for partner firm Smith of Derby in April, and it should be in place later this month.

## RBS TO QUIT CITY CENTRE

Around 2,600 workers will be lost to Broughton as the Royal Bank of Scotland relocates staff from central Edinburgh to its modern HQ near the airport.

Staff will move out of the two Fettes Row and Dundas Street premises, and two buildings on St Andrew Square.

The phased relocation will take place in the first half of next year, with full integration scheduled for early 2017. It is part of a bid to save the repeatedly disgraced and indebted institution around £18 million per year.

The transfer of staff will affect businesses across the city centre, but could be a really hard blow for local small independents around Dundas Street and Canonmills.

Cafes, carry-outs and haircutters have welcomed the custom of nearly 2,000 RBS staff here for much of their weekday business since the architectural 'three-decker sandwich' was completed in 1978.

We approached RBS concerning their future plans for the site. Would they sell, lease or redevelop it? Would the site be added to (or force a re-think of) existing outline proposals for RBS property fronting Eyre Place/Terrace and King George V Park? A spokesperson told us that options were being weighed and no firm decision had yet been made.

RBS staff will no doubt miss their current central location. We wish them joy in the majestic emptiness of Outer Mongogarburn.



## HOT UP THE HUSTINGS?



*Spurtle* hosted a General Election hustings last month attended by all seven candidates for the Edinburgh North & Leith constituency and around 150 locals. A full report appeared on our website next day (17.4.15).

A Lord Ashcroft poll published on 20 April suggested Labour would struggle to hold seats across the capital. The SNP, it asserted, led in EN&L by 14%. All sides afterwards insisted they were optimistic and taking nothing for granted.

Two audience members at the hustings complained later that politicians had found it too easy to spout tried and tested lines. 'I was hoping for more of a stair head rammy,' commented one. The public should be leading, not getting lectured, complained the other.

We'll consider ways of reformatting similar events in future to include a tad more *Gladiator* and a smidge less *Downton Abbey*. Until then, content yourself with Jaundiced of Claremont's thumbnail impressions overleaf.

## Briefly



Artist **Janet Melrose** returns to the Union Gallery from 8 May for the 20th **solo exhibition** of her career. The semi-abstract works in **Making Tracks** are inspired by the woodland and its inhabitants around her home in Crieff.

The **May Fair at Broughton St Mary's Parish Church** (Bellevue Cres) will be on Sat 30 May from 11am–2pm. Books, CDs, DVDs, plants, 'new gifts and toiletries (e.g. unwanted gifts)', booze, soft drinks, sauce, shampoo, jewellery, baking. **Tickets £1 (children 50p)** 'will include tea or coffee with a biscuit'. Allow to cool before pocketing.

A very few locals remain concerned about the proposed **levelling-off of Drummond CHS's playground** with thousands of tons of rubble from the future St James Quarter building excavations. **This will not happen.** Our online report last month was posted on 1 April.

The UK Parliamentary General Election is on **7 May 2015**. Polling stations will be open from **7am–10pm**. For a range of useful and impartial information on **the who, the when, the where and the how**, visit: <http://goo.gl/V2IczS>

When a **recent Pilrig St burglary victim** grew impatient at Police Scotland's response, he began **investigating for himself**. Neighbours told of suspicious sightings. Patterns, descriptions and recognitions followed. The **Poirot of Pilrig** suggested a perp. to the plods, who later searched an address and recovered **90% of the stolen goods**. Two other local burglaries were solved as a result. **Police Scotland** might have solved the crime themselves if those responsible for the **Leith side** of Pilrig St had spoken to those responsible for the **Edinburgh side**.

Leith Central Community Council's **annual general meeting** will be on 18 May in McDonald Rd Library from 7pm. **Local historian Andrew Grant** will talk about the Gretna Disaster.

*Spartle's* Tim Smith has joined a local course on **bookbinding for the totally unskilled**. 'To make things easier for beginners with clumsy fingers,' he tells us, 'they encourage each of us to fashion a book that's as large and as thick as possible'. The name of the class is 'Make yourself a tome'.

**Leith Central Community Council** will soon have its own noticeboard. Look out for items of local interest attached to the railings outside **McDonald Road Library**.

## Claremont development site for sale

McEwan Fraser Legal are advertising the sale of a 10-flat development site at 84–86 East Claremont Street with a banner slung from the gable end. We hear a verbal offer has been accepted already.

Planning permission was granted to developer McEwan Frazer (sic) for a five-and-a-half storey building comprising 8 flats and 2 duplex apartments here in 2006 (Ref. 04/03812/FUL), subject to a legal agreement. That agreement was never signed and the application was withdrawn in May 2012. No planning permission therefore applies at this stage.

The former approved scheme controversially entailed creating 65 on-street parking spaces for new and existing residents. It attracted 24 objections from neighbours, two from the New Town and Pilrig Community Council, and one from the Bellevue and Claremont Residents Association. Previous schemes were seen off by locals in 2001 and 2002.



## Hustings nutshells: how they fared



**Sarah Beattie-Smith (Green):** Confident delivery of radical policies in mellifluous tones. Values listening over lecturing, she said, again and again and again. Seemed to be typing novel on laptop during proceedings. Rising star.

**Deidre Brock (SNP):** At pains to convey political calm and reassuring common sense. Positioned self as potentially sane Scottish presence in topsy-turvy Westminster. Appeared nervous at times, perhaps at proximity of victory.

**Mark Lazarowicz (Labour):** Timing is important in politics. Arrived with 29 seconds to spare. Professional but never impassioned. Only one to talk at any length about fairness in foreign policy, which reflected well on him.

**Iain McGill (Conservative):** Local roots and work for disadvantaged impressed. Spotted, named and relevantly contextualised local attendees. 'Unconflicted' support of TTIP and Trident drew some sharp intakes of breath.

**Alan Melville (UKIP):** Softly spoken, thoughtful, self-deprecating, humorous. Avoided gaffes. Sounded more like an independent mind than – as most had predicted – raving extremist. For these reasons, made confused folk queasy.

**Martin Veart (Lib-Dem):** Did well for one who hadn't seen manifesto until day before. Criticised own party for too few women. As oil-industry expert geologist, could not generalise on fracking succinctly. Engaging modesty.

**Bruce Whitehead (Left Unity):** Articulate, caring, 1 of 2 real radicals present. Refreshing clarity on 'source of all ills: voracious capitalism'. Displayed an unexpected enthusiasm for trolley-buses. Liked his hat a lot. — *Jaundiced of Claremont.*

## Vote leaves gulls sick as parrots

London Street has spoken. Following a CEC-organised poll, residents have voted to ditch their not-so-gull-proof refuse bags in favour of communal bins by 49 votes to 40. An astonishing 41 households did not express an opinion, perhaps unwittingly explaining why past efforts to control litter on the street have proved so ineffective.

We perfectly understand some locals' preference for a beautiful Georgian street unencumbered by huge black cuboids on wheels.

We also understand the views of many other residents and non-residents who, for years now, have expressed disgust at tip-toeing through unbeautiful chip wrappers, yogurt pots and soiled nappies here on their routes to and from work. This was a victory for common sense. We suspect everyone will very soon get used to it.

## Locals seek better and clearer police reporting

Since the advent of the new, unified Police Scotland, some community councils have noticed a deterioration in how crime statistics are conveyed.

Monthly reports often appear to have been cobbled together at the last moment by officers who didn't know 40 minutes earlier they'd be attending.

Statistics are usually vague in terms of what happened where and when, riddled with jargon, and delivered verbally at high speed in a way which is difficult to hear let alone understand. Occasionally, junior officers badly explain ill-defined constraints on what they are and are not allowed to explain.

To make things worse, the kind of statistics offered are different between community councils, inconsistent from month to month, and divisional areas rarely match political ones. Building even a vague sense of crime trends is impossible under these circumstances.

Some suggest that there have been technical problems in reconciling formerly discrete constabulary data sets and technologies. Others say it feels almost as if Police Scotland top brass are reluctant to explain what's been going on for fear that people may get the wrong idea or, worse, start monitoring police performance.

Leith Central CC are the latest to express dissatisfaction at such shortcomings. They will write to Chief Superintendent Mark Williams (Commander of the Edinburgh City Division) seeking clarification.



## Watch out for Swallows and Martins

Swallows get all the credit for heralding in summer, but we're visited by all three species of native Hirundinidae in Spurtleshire. Given their size and delicate build, it's amazing they can navigate to and from Africa (no-one yet knows how), but with their confidence, cheerful twittering and spectacular flying skills they are very welcome back.

*How to see them:* Swallows fly fast, and can be seen anywhere coursing low over grassy areas or catching flying ants high in the thermals. Recognise them by their elegant wing shape and long, thin, forked tails. Although black with a white underbelly in flight, close up they're a dark metallic blue with dark red chins. They mostly seek sheltered ledges within human structures for their mud-and-grass cup-shaped nests.

*Also look for:* Buff-coloured Sand Martins are most often seen near rivers, where they tunnel into banks to nest. Their colour and short stumpy tails are distinctive. House Martins are the builders, constructing neat mud domes under overhanging eaves (see photo). Spot them in flight by the bright white patch on their tails.—*Miles Forde*



## Review: *Good Vibrations* by Margaret Halliday

'The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there,' wrote L.P. Hartley. How alike Scotland was, and how utterly foreign not that long ago, is quite an eye-opener.

Claremont resident Margaret Halliday was a 17-year-old English college student in Glasgow in the 1960s. She had the optimism, appetite and opportunities young women today take for granted. But she was also naïve. When she became pregnant, her whole world changed.

As an unmarried mother, she soon encountered the shocked hostility of an older generation, the boyfriend's reluctant assumption of responsibility, and a social system seemingly determined to part her from her child. Then there was the abundance of predatory men, some offering 'housekeeper' jobs to girls with few options.

Halliday writes fluently in this frank autobiography. She believably evokes her young self's thoughts and sensations, the voices and attitudes of past generations. She does so with humour, telling detail and an amazing lack of bitterness. Sixties Scotland emerges as cold and grotty – an impatient mix of sexual urgency and 'moral' cruelty. That Halliday flourished is testament to her tenacity and courage. [*Good Vibrations* is published by FeedARead.com, ISBN978-1-78510-454-1]—

*Kay Hutton*



## Briefly

Following last month's successful **New Town Pop-Up Community Cinema** at the Glasite Meeting House, the **Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh** will host open-air cinema this summer. **Luna Cinema** will screen *Grand Budapest Hotel* (4.9.15), *Mamma Mia!* (05/09/15) and *Back to the Future* (6.9.15). Early booking is advised while weather optimism lasts. See: <http://goo.gl/6vLGcW>

**Out of the Blue** will soon extend to the Leith Customs House on a short-term 2-year basis, **subleasing it for studio space** whilst more permanent arrangements for the building are prepared by new owner **City of Edinburgh Council** and the **Scottish Historic Buildings Trust**. Locals are already anxious lest popular aspirations for a **Leith Museum** get forgotten or downgraded. Recently, local group **Greener Leith** has reported on plans for the building on their website (see 29.3.15 and update on 31.3.15).

The next meeting of the **Broughton History Society** is on Mon 11 May at 7pm in Drummond CHS. Peter Dryburgh will talk about 'Addresses in Old Edinburgh'.

**Good news from the New Town.** A new occupant has applied for permission to refurbish the outside of **43 Howe St** while retaining the old 'News Corner Greengrocer' signage. However, the old wording has **already been obliterated** and Pad Lifestyle seems to be running a by-appointment luxury furnishings shop there. Over the road at **73 Northumberland St**, permission is sought to convert the former Margiotta branch into **2 yoga studios**. And the former New Town Store at **43 Dundas St** is reopening soon as Archipelago, an **artisan bakery**.



Broughton History Society's *Newsletter* has had a particularly rich run of form recently. Its latest issue includes an **affectionate, funny and occasionally mordant** article by Leslie Hills on the **Labour Party activist Freda White** (above). Download a pdf here: <http://goo.gl/Pu5FZu>

A solemn procession from the **Dalmeny St Drill Hall to Rosebank Cemetery** will culminate in a ceremony to mark the **100th anniversary of the Gretna Disaster** on 22 May. Princess Anne will attend. For details see: <http://goo.gl/viba9e>

# Moreover ...



Photomontages of a proposed 'ribbon hotel' at the heart of the St James Quarter have not met universal acclaim (Ref. 15/01858/AMC). One wonders if architects Jestico and Whiles have read Werner Holzwarth and Wolf Erlbruch's informative picture book for children *The Little Mole who Knew it was none of his Business*: [<http://goo.gl/Leh04d>]. If the design is approved, perhaps all Edinburgh residents will soon be asking 'Did you do this on my head?' For plans see: [<http://goo.gl/W5nPHh>].

**Public toilets at Canonmills** are to close as part of CEC's budget-slashing exercise. They will be missed, as so often in the past.

**Friends of Pilrig Park** have continued clearing surplus ash, elder, and sycamore near Pilrig House, and say the result **looks cleaner and feels safer**. They report that CEC has identified 3 areas for wildflower meadows, and will mow paths through areas earmarked for long grass. **Edinburgh Living Landscapes have been active in the park**. This partnership between CEC and various environmental groups seeks **better ways to manage green spaces**, encouraging biodiversity and often saving a lot of money in the process.

The **Albany St-based** youth-homelessness charity **The Rock Trust** seeks sponsorship partners for this summer's **5th Postcard Art Exhibition & Auction**. Visit:<http://goo.gl/ZkopKS>

**STOP PRESS!** Officials are recommending to the **Development Submanagement Committee** (29 Apr) that permission be refused for erection of a **hideous great lump** outside 73 George St (Issue 239). 'The proposed freestanding illuminated advert would have an **adverse effect upon the interest of amenity and public safety**. There are no material considerations which outweigh this conclusion.'

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Every Monday 6.30pm

Stockbridge Library

surgeries: second

Monday of the month

1:30pm

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## Alison Johnstone MSP for Lothian Region



On the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday of the month during term time I hold a surgery for Lothian residents at the Scottish Parliament between 11am and 1pm.

Please call to book a surgery appointment or to arrange another time and venue that is convenient for you.

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## New Town/Broughton Community Council

THE COMMUNITY COUNCIL  
REPRESENTS THE VIEWS  
OF LOCAL RESIDENTS TO  
EDINBURGH CITY COUNCIL

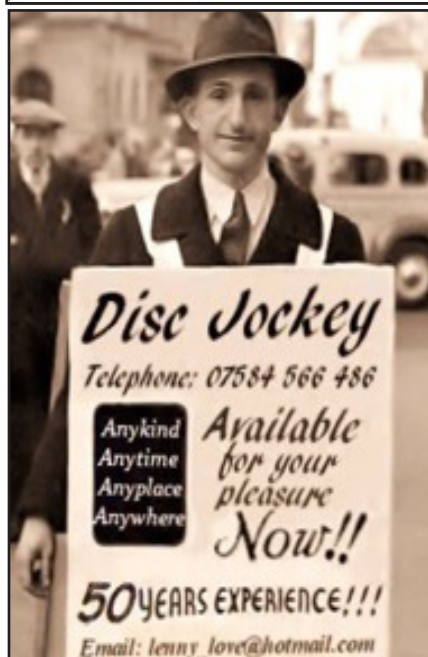
AGM &  
GENERAL MEETING

Monday 11 May

at 7.15pm

Broughton St Mary's Parish  
Church, Bellevue Crescent

[www.ntbcc.org.uk/contact/](http://www.ntbcc.org.uk/contact/)



## AM DECORATING

Your local painter & decorator **Alastair McAlpine**  
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