

Spurttle



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**February
2012**

No 203

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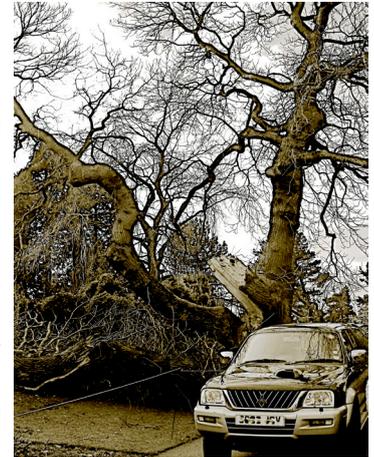
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BROUGHTON'S INDEPENDENT STIRRER Free

STORM-TOSSED GARDEN APPEALS

'Shocking' January storms were the worst experienced by Edinburgh's Royal Botanic Garden in 30 years. Not only were 34 trees lost, but extensive – possibly structural – damage occurred to the public and research greenhouses. Some 400 panes of glass were lost. RBG have now launched a public appeal for emergency funds so that work to safeguard buildings and protect vulnerable specimens exposed to the elements can be completed as soon as possible. To donate, visit: [<http://bit.ly/yfMCjp>].

One notable casualty of the gales was the much loved Spanish chestnut (*Castanea sativa*) close by the rockery and redwoods. Curator Dr David Knott estimates it is 150–200 years old, and believes it may have been a boundary marker for the former Caledonian Horticultural Society plot. Only time will tell if the tree survives (it got through the loss of a limb on the other side in its youth), but Botanic staff may lop a few branches to reduce the weight on the remaining trunk.



WHEELS FALL OFF BAXTER'S PLACE HOTEL PLAN



The A-listed 1–5 Baxter's Place is back on the market now that Dublin-based Fitzpatrick Design Collection's plans for a 5-star boutique hotel have ceased.

The property is on offer again as a 167-bedroom 4-star, or 230-bedroom 3-star, or 269-bedroom budget hotel.

The sale is being managed by investment services agent Jones Lang LaSalle Hotels, which predicts deals in this sector worldwide will roughly equal those of 2011 at around \$30 billion.

However, they see Britain in general and Edinburgh in particular as likely hotspots, with prime property for sale here at well below peak prices.

Local heritage watchdogs and the New Town and Broughton Community Council have been concerned by the state of Baxter's Place since it last changed hands in 2008, with an increasing number of windows there being broken and apparent squatters hanging about in doors and gardens (see Issues 168, 171, 173, 182, 193).

LOCAL ACTIVIST ILLUMINATES

Many readers will have occasionally observed contractors working upon sections of road or pavement, and wondered whether the scheme was strictly necessary. How was it prioritised, through which process, by whom and at what cost? Who got paid for the job?

The indefatigable Harald Tobermann of Pilrig is one of Broughton's finest, sceptical members of the awkward squad, and has turned his attention to just such a case: the recent resurfacing of local backwater East Scotland Street Lane (optimistically glossed in Issue 196).

CEC officials were initially reluctant to answer his queries on costs and mechanisms. They suggested he should pay £60–80 for the information through Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations 2004 [<http://bit.ly/wGGR0W>], even though such figures would be readily available – like any other contract figures – on a departmental database.

Tobermann persisted, began invoking the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 and the Scottish Information Commissioner, and eventually CEC relented. As a result, we can now reveal that the works cost £51,348, funded from the Road and Footway Capital Investment budget 2011/12. See *Extras* (1.2.12) for the full response.

Publication of even these straightforward but absurdly hard-to-access data represents a significant gain for civic transparency. It's a first step. Tobermann now has the bone firmly between his teeth, and is gnawing on it.

BUSH TELEGRAPH WRONG

Following Sainsbury's decision to open a shop at 8 Howe Street, rumours have begun circulating locally that the superstore has put in a bid for the Margiotta premises opposite at No. 72 and/or for the whole chain. We asked Managing Director Franco Margiotta if there was any truth in the story.

'I have heard this rumour also,' he told *Spurttle*. 'It is completely unfounded and I haven't the foggiest as to how it's come about. I have not even been approached by Sainsbury's except to notify us – along with everyone else – that they were opening here.'

'We will be trading as usual from this site and from all our other sites, hopefully for a long time to come.'



Briefly

The **Broughton History Society** meets at 7.30pm on 6 Feb. in Drummond CHS. **Fay Young** will talk on ‘**Broughton and Immigration ... a Story of Change and Chance**’, subject to last-minute alterations.

Daily Record readers last month voted for Broughton’s hammer-throwing heroine **Kimberly Reed** as **Young Athlete of the Year**. She received her trophy at a glittering ceremony in the **Kelvin Hall, Glasgow** on 28 January and was featured in the paper.

The **Princess Royal** visited Elm Row’s **Valvona & Crolla** on 13 Jan. Staff there later declined to supply an unreliable tabloid with **intimate antepasto revelations**, but that did not stop it asserting Her Royal Highness filled up on posh ‘**cheese and chicken liver pate**’. *Spartle* sources in the know suggest royal palates prefer **spam fritters, cheesie-eggy-hammy toasties** and ‘**Dog’s Body**’.

Our new **font of bicycling intelligence**, Tim Smith, says the footway/cyclepath from St Mark’s Bridge to Warriston Rd Bridge is to be upgraded. Hard surfacing will cover **grit, puddles and potholes**, and a ramp will replace the steps at the western end. Works will form part of the Water of Leith Flood Defence project, but there is no precise date for completion yet.

Congratulations to **Napier Bathrooms & Interiors** on Canonmills, selected by industry experts as one of 4 contenders for Bathroom Retailer of the Year. Winners of the **kkbreview Awards** will be announced in March.

Guildford-based **The Gym Group** seek listed building consent to refurbish an empty basement at 2 Waterloo Place and create a ‘**members only fitness gym**’ (Ref. 11/04007/LBC). This correspondent will gladly drop off his members whilst enjoying cake across the road at Blandfield-based **Café Briganta**.

St Mark’s Path (between the park and Bonnington Rd) has not been a pretty sight lately, with excessive litter and fouling. ‘**Black-ops**’ **environmental wardens** now have the area under covert observation.

Edinburgh Central MSP Marco Biagi has new surgery times for 2012: 5pm on Tuesdays at 77 Buccleuch Street. 1pm on Fridays at: Stockbridge Library (1st of the month); Murrayfield Parish Church (2nd of the month); Tynecastle High School Community Wing (3rd of the month); Peace & Justice Centre, St John’s, Princes Street (4th of the month, except August).

Gale-related water levels and substantial debris have resulted in three of the **Antony Gormley statues** tipping over. Currently sunk in the Water of Leith are those figures at Bell’s Mill Weir (SNGMA), St Mark’s Park and Bonnington.

Broughton St Mary’s Parish Church in Bellevue Cres. will host a special service at 7pm on Sun. 4 March as part of the LGBT History Month.

Botanic Cottage to rise again

Botanic Cottage – the gardener’s house and lecture theatre formerly situated at Leith Walk – will have a new lease of life within the Royal Botanic Garden.

Painstakingly dismantled in 2008 (see Issues 152–3, 167, 171), the building is to be rebuilt, brick by brick using traditional methods, at the north end of the garden, oriented on the main archway through the beech hedge.

As part of the £800K scheme, the Cottage will be at the centre of new teaching and meeting spaces, inside and out, for members of the public. Lottery funding, landfill tax windfalls and a public appeal are likely sources. But no-one at RGBE can yet say when.



Canonmills, to be exact ...



In *Breaking news* (7.12.11), reader Bob Hussey vented his frustration at a local launderette’s misspelling of its location as ‘Cannon Mills’. On 11.2.12 he returned, fulminating this time against the Esso Petrol Station’s equally wrong rendering of ‘Cannonmills’.

Esso should certainly know better as their wall at the junction of Canonmills and Canon Street bears a plaque in which ‘Canon’ – spelt with one *n* – appears no fewer than six times.

It explains the area’s early history, and the discovery here in 1964 of a stone inscribed ‘the Baxters land 1686’. Fascinating. Shame about the lack of an apostrophe and woefully inconsistent use of capitals.

EVENING NEWS NEW LOW



Not everyone in Edinburgh admires the editorial culture of the *Evening News*. However, even its staunchest critics were surprised last month by the tabloid’s change in tone towards problematic but mostly young, mostly friendly, mostly cooperative idealists temporarily occupying part of St Andrew Square on points of principle.

With one breath it described them as ‘a colourful footnote in our history’, with the next as a ‘ragtag bunch’ of ‘wasters and chancers’ (9/10 January). Perhaps senior *Evening News* staff find points of principle hard to understand.

‘**BOOTED OUT!**’ the paper snarled on 14 January, sounding suddenly like an eye-popping, spittle-flecked skinhead as it leapt to the defence of George Street hoteliers, Louis Vuitton and Emporio Armani clients, and lurching ladies at Harvey Nicks distressed for once by the distant prospect of a ‘dangerous cocktail’. Protestors elected to leave St Andrew Square, peacefully, on 24/5 January.

Perhaps the *Evening News* should take a hint: such opportunistic posturing in print impresses no-one.

Offbeat audio tours go west

The innovative locals behind ‘Walking Heads’ are taking on our neighbouring city with their *Glasgow Music Tour*.

The new audio guide covers a century of diverse music styles to bring Glasgow’s musical heritage to life, ushering the strolling listener to bars and ballrooms overlooked or still loved.

Based in Argyll Street, but largely hailing from Broughton’s East Claremont Street, ‘Walking Heads’ [www.walkingheads.net] sprang onto the new media



scene last summer with their *Edinburgh Comedy Guide*. This headphone event combines Edinburgh’s comedy hotspots and history, with an accident-prone historian and his hapless assistant (played by Bruce Morton and Susan Morrison, pictured right) introducing new ways to explore the city, ending on our doorstep at The Stand on York Place.

What would be *your* comedy or musical highlights, historical or current, in Spurtleshire? *Ella Taylor-Smith*



Robert Burn, architect (1752–1815)

It is a humbling truth that fame in one century often decays into obscurity in another. Take the case of Robert Burn, once Broughton's brightest, now almost forgotten.

Born in Jessfield, Portobello in 1752, Burn first appears in the records 23 years later as he supervised masonry work at St Cuthbert's in Edinburgh. By 1782 he had become a city burgher, and was undertaking prestigious architectural projects such as the turreted and crenellated Hermitage of Braid (1785). Between 1790 and 1800, he laid out 141–71 Leith Street (now gone), and his were the designs for the palace-fronted Picardy Place (1803-9), 1–12 Union Street, most of Forth Street (1804), and down to 41 Broughton Street (1804–10). He even lived here, his drawing academy at the top of the hill benefiting from good light through a bow window above what is now The Street. His most famous structure was a folly: the Nelson Monument on Calton Hill (1807), preferred to an alternative design by Alexander Nasmyth (see Issue 181) on disputed grounds of cost (see *Breaking news* 1.2.12).

Interestingly, c.1791, he fell out with namesake Robert Burns over a memorial stone in Canongate Churchyard: 'Five pounds ten shillings per account, I owe Mr R. Burn, architect,' wrote the poet, 'for erecting the stone over the grave of poor Fergusson. He was two years in erecting it after I had commissioned him for it, and I have been two years in paying him after he sent me his account, so he and I are quits!'

Burn died in 1815 and was buried in a substantial monument in Old Calton Burial Ground (pictured). It records that he was survived by his wife and 12 children. A rare copy of his portrait is held at the RCAHM (Ref. FID/199/1). *AM*



Briefly

Local traditional music school **Pilrig Fiddlers** is starting a new Absolute Beginners class on Friday afternoons during term time in **Pilrig Church Hall**, just off Leith Walk. For more advanced players, there is the Mixed Instruments Group – (just about) any competently and enthusiastically played instrument is welcome. For more information email fiddlesticks@PilrigFiddlers.org.uk or Tel. 554 7698 (eves).

Axolotl Gallery on Dundas St is to close its doors and freeze the company for the next couple of months before probably relocating. Sadly, the change has been prompted by a loved one's very serious illness.

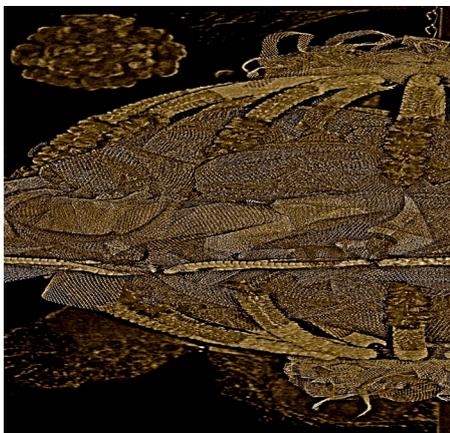
On a happier note, a new exhibition – *Poetic Licence* – runs at the Union Gallery on Broughton St until 27 Feb., highlighting the 'Cromarty Series' by James Newton Adams in collaboration with writer **Iain Finlay Macleod**. Paintings by **Joyce Gunn Cairns, Olivia Irvine and Imogen Alabaster** will also feature. Meanwhile, in new-ish gallery/studio/café **Bon Papillon** at 15 Howe St., *Observations* – comprising drawings and paintings by Thora Clyne and Tom Sutton Smith – will run from 11 Feb.–8 Mar. Finally, **Susie Anderson**, manager at Northumberland St's **Gallery on the Corner** starts a year's maternity leave on 10 Feb. We wish her every success with her new production.

A new **steakhouse** opens this month at **12 Picardy Place**. 'Using a concept ... different from any other in the city', it will be called **Steak @ No. 12**. Up to 40 staff will be employed in the new venture, which replaces the **Green Room** venue and apparently complements the parallel **Restaurant Mark Greenway**. Backers of both eateries **Brown Taylor Management** anticipate 'the true essence of good meat, cooked to perfection, and presented in the most extraordinary style and fashion'. *Spurtle predicts sparks*.

Further to our report in Issue 202, a Council official has confirmed to us that land on **Bellevue Rd** to the west of Broughton Primary School's lower playground is in the process of being sold. 'Several offers were received,' they continued, on the closing date 'some time ago', and negotiations are still under way with 'a preferred bidder'. Asked when the process would be complete, there followed a sigh and the claim that it was 'impossible to say'. Whoever claimed the devil is in the detail?

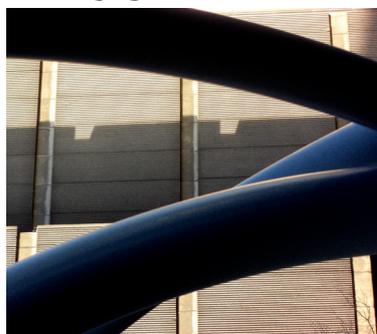
A remarkably **vague** pre-pre-planning application was held on 11.1.12 about **Royal Bank of Scotland** plans for Eyre Place and Terrace. More consultations will follow. *Spurtle is suspicious*. See *Breaking news* (12.1.12).

Celebrating art and science

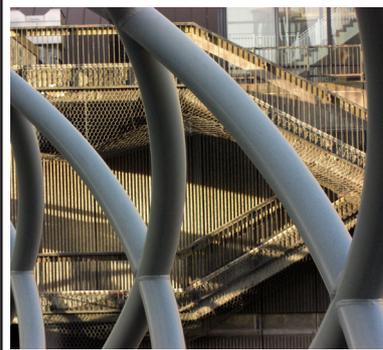


One of the most unusual and significant exhibitions of late is on display until 26 February in the St James Centre suite 34–5 (near the Cathedral end by the lift). Organised and presented by ASCUS (Art Science Collaborative), the show comprises works by four teams of established artists and scientists from Edinburgh and beyond. It spans various media from sculptural installation to on-site video and audio works to digital prints. It explores themes such as climate change, the theatrics of genetics, mathematically arranged fabrics and the dissemination of a birdsong in unexpected and whimsical ways. On a broader level, ASCUS highlights the connection between the arts and sciences, and seeks to inspire community involvement. *JRM*

The joy of concrete



You'll miss it when it's gone, perhaps, but don't expect to miss it soon: Henderson Global Investment's redevelopment plans for the St James Centre (shot here from the bridge over Leith Street) appear stalled by economic uncertainty.



Moreover ...



Following the local campaign begun in 2010, the **Court of the Lord Lyon** will permit Leith Neighbourhood Partnership to display the area's historic **coat of arms** as of April. The meaning of the Latin legend **Sigillum oppidi de Leith** may be lost on many, but late-night taxi drivers have long understood its bastardised form 'Sickilliam hopeidie – taе Leith' as a request to hurry.

A planning application (Ref. 11/03678) by residents to instal a **gate between street and front door** at Category 1-listed 2 **Gayfield Place** has been turned down since it would not comply with Council policy on **preserving the character and appearance of the New Town Conservation Area**.

A second 6-part series of sitcom **Pram Face**, starring Angus Deayton, Anna Chancellor and **Inverleith Park** starts on BBC3 this month [www.comedy.co.uk/guide/tv/pramface/].

In the 8 Jan. edition of BBC1's **Antiques Roadshow** from Hartland Abbey in Devon, Karen Lovatt sought advice about various pattern books for her father **Ken Clark's ceramic designs** of the 1950s/60s. She had no idea where they might be now, but an **acute Edinburgh viewer** recognised one as that mentioned here in **Issue 196**. More news on this soon.

AMA (New Town) Ltd seek listed building consent to change the use of offices at **127-9 George St** (next to Brown's) and create **58 new serviced apartments** in the basement and 5 floors above (Ref. 12/00048/LBC).

Local litter-louts tremble ...



as covert observation begins

Malcolm Chisholm MSP Edinburgh North and Leith



Constituency Office:
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Fax: 0131 557 6781

Saturday surgeries:
Leith Library, Ferry Road: 9am.
Royston Wardieburn Community
Centre, Pilton Drive North: 11 am.

Email: Malcolm.Chisholm.msp@scottish.parliament.uk

New Town/Broughton Community Council

The Community Council
represents the views
of local residents to
Edinburgh City Council

Next meeting:
Monday 6 February
at 7.30pm

Broughton St Mary's Parish
Church, Bellevue Crescent
(Drummond Room)

secretary@ntbcc.org.uk

Mark Lazarowicz MP for Edinburgh North and Leith



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Friday advice sessions:
4.00pm **Stockbridge Library**,
no appointment necessary;
5.00pm **5 Croall Place**;
other surgeries throughout the
constituency – phone for details

Spurtle Team: John Dickie, MF, Ali George, Maria Hart, George Hosey, Alan McIntosh, John Ross Maclean, Graeme Robertson, David Sterratt.
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