

Spurtle



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BROUGHTON'S INDEPENDENT STIRRER Free

TOUGH QUESTIONS FOR PILRIG GUEST HOUSE

The Council's Licensing Sub-committee on 14 December resolved to investigate a controversial Pilrig Street guesthouse following years of complaints by neighbours.

Since 2008, businesses at No. 26 – now owned by the Cameron Guest House Group (CGHG) – have attracted numerous objections to the renewal of the HMO licence. CGHG now seeks to accommodate 16 residents.

The Acorn Lodge Guest House is used by Edinburgh Council (and other local authorities) as temporary housing for homeless and other people. Whilst accepting their usefulness, Pilrig residents are worried by the concentration of 4 such establishments in the area.

At No. 26 they have particular concerns about:

- poor upkeep of the property
- proper registration of the landlord
- badly trained, inexperienced and ill-supported staff
- poor understanding and communication within CGHG and between CGHG and the public
- slow, 'unhelpful, misleading and even offensive' responses to legitimate complaints (e.g. about used needles dumped in a next-door garden)
- general contempt and disregard for neighbours and the community.

Councillors on the sub-



Photo courtesy of R. Davis.

Happy New Year, Broughton!

committee took note and will continue their consideration of CGHG's application until 8 March. They have ordered a report by the Director of Services for the Community on CGHG's tenancy management, and requested the presence of a representative from Temporary Accommodation Services. CGHG must submit a report to the sub-committee on its inspection and staff training procedures; and the fabric of the property at No. 26 will be inspected, especially access at the rear and a crumbling chimney-stack.

More generally, locals have expressed doubt at whether such hostels – run for private profit rather than as public social services – offer good service to users or represent value for money to Council Tax payers. How much CHGH charges the Council has not been revealed for reasons of 'commercial sensitivity'. However, figures available online suggest rates of at least £40 per person per night.



FURIOUS LOCALS UNITED ON SHRUBHILL HOUSE 'PLOUK'

Leith Central Community Council (LCCC) has expressed its anger and disappointment to Unite PLC, owners of the Shrubhill House site on Leith Walk.

At last month's meeting, attended by a Unite representative, LCCC lambasted the firm for leaving the site unsecured, unkempt and partially derelict for five years. The stolen Middlefield gates were not replaced for most of 2012, metal hoardings 'scream in the wind' to the distraction of local residents, and the building is 'a massive plouk' in the area.

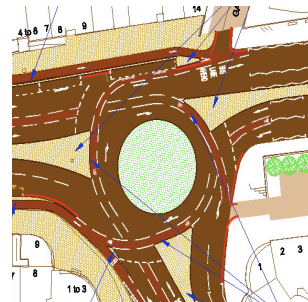
A mobile security team supposedly in charge of the site has never been seen, and – despite claims that it is amenable to supporting, for example, community arts projects here – written requests to collaborate with the owners on temporary usage have been mislaid by Unite. Letters on this and other matters from LCCC have gone unanswered.

Jagdeep Bhogal, for Unite, said the owners are in talks to sell the site to a student accommodation developer, and to this end would seek renewal of the existing planning consent in January 2013. LCCC showed no enthusiasm for supporting their application.



SHOULDER TO SHOULDER ON LEITH WALK

Greener Leith, Leith Business Association, Leith Federation of Small Businesses and Leith Central and Leith Links Community Councils are coordinating their responses to City of Edinburgh Council's preliminary proposals for Leith Walk improvements [<http://bit.ly/WDQEW6>]. The cycling organisation Spokes may also add its voice.



The move is a pointed rebuttal of some official claims that there is no unity of purpose or argument among concerned members of the public. Similar claims have already been levelled separately at cyclists.

The groups' comments predominantly concern safety: proposed cycle lanes were branded 'more dangerous than helpful' and a 20mph limit is advocated. Arrangements for cyclists at the London Road roundabout (pictured) have attracted universal criticism. Management of bins and parking, increased greenery, and longer pedestrian crossing times are also on the wish-list.

Members of the public have until 13 January to complete the Council's online 10-minute survey here: [<http://svy.mk/VekG7z>]. The final design will be developed for approval by CEC's Transport & Environment Committee on 19 March.

Briefly

Walls have ears, and so do glass-fronted shop fronts. This from Fergus Smith, proprietor of gone-but-not-forgotten **Second Edition on Howard St**: 'Conversation on the pavement from two admirers of our fine selection of **Evelyn Waugh first editions**: "Look at all those Evelyn Waugh books. You like Waugh, don't you?" Reply: "Yes, I've read most of her books."'

Wherever you live in Edinburgh, unwanted **real Christmas trees** can be **left at the kerbside** for recycling. Remove decorations. Cut into 5ft lengths. Do *not* put in plastic bags. More complicated **optional arrangements** involving recycling centres, brown and communal bins can be pondered at [<http://bit.ly/TQeGN0>].

Plans for a 2-storey 'Darth Vader' dwelling in **Barony Place** (Ref. 12/03470/FUL) have been withdrawn (see Issue 213).

Leith Time Bank, launched in July last year (Issue 208), currently has reserves including a range of **languages, sewing, knitting and cooking**. Volunteers are also sought to help older residents. **To deposit or withdraw time**, Tel. 553 2559. To find out more, visit: [<http://bit.ly/TxO8RZ>].

Recent traffic upheavals do not appear to deter the re-domestication of **Albany Street**. An Edinburgh couple has applied for consents to convert the Category A-listed **No. 28** from a vacant office building to a 5-bedroom, 6-loo (that's right, 6) **'dwelling townhouse'** (Ref. 12/04310/FUL). If they all flush at once, parts of Barony Street may be washed out to sea.

Broughton History Society gathers next at 7.00pm in Drummond CHS on Mon 14 Jan. **Eric Graham** will talk on **'The Legendary Leith Smacks'**. We advise against passing notes, whispering or sitting in the front row.

Leith Central Community Council meets at 7.00pm on Mon 21 Jan and 25 Feb (both dates TBC) in McDonald Rd Library. The **New Town and Broughton CC's** next meeting will be at 7.30pm on Mon 4 Feb in Broughton St Mary's Parish Church.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the opening of **Princes Street's east end** is leading to a **gradual reduction** in traffic diverting through Heriot Row, Abercromby Place and Albany Street. However, local residents have requested **more and clearer signs** – especially along Queen St – about the new route.

Director of Edinburgh World Heritage **Adam Wilkinson** has written to the Council expressing concern over lack of progress in restoring **Forsyth's Globe Finial**, absent now for 8 months.

Parks need more attention

The Friends of King George V and Scotland Yard Parks have welcomed an annual Council audit downgrading this local green space from 'Excellent' to 'Very Good'.

The new rating – based on categories such as welcome, health and safety, access, provision and condition of facilities, conservation, sustainability and maintenance – is more realistic.

Friends were particularly pleased at recognition of poor ground maintenance and unacceptable vehicle tracks and rutting left behind by Council bin vans. These problems particularly affect the park's south-west corner which has become a 'semi-permanent swamp'.

Improved drainage and path widening would be overly expensive solutions, so re-siting of bins closer to the Logan Street entrance will be tested instead in the medium term.

Meanwhile, Leith Central Community Council has been questioning the Council's recent positive quality assessment of Pilrig Park, claiming much more needs to be done about waterlogged paths, redundant signs and fallen trees. There are too few benches, and bins which have been available for some time have yet to appear because no private contractor has been found to install them.

A Council official pointed out that community parks such as Pilrig have fairly low targets to meet since they receive less funding [<http://bit.ly/TYCmi5>]. He promised action, but called for local park users to become more involved.



Local families face squeeze

Some 5,800 families in the Edinburgh North and Leith constituency will lose out as a result of Government benefit constraints, claims Labour's Mark Lazarowicz.

Writing last month, the local Westminster MP argued that the Chancellor of the Exchequer's decision on 5 December to uprate working-age benefits by 1 per cent for the next three years would not keep pace with inflation – currently at over 2 per cent.

Lazarowicz used HM Revenue and Customs data for April 2012 to determine how many local families claim working tax credit, and so are likely to be squeezed by rising food, heating and housing costs.

'The Government has said that it wants to make sure it always pays to work but basic working tax credits which aim to make up for any loss of income as people move off benefits into work will be frozen next year – 2013–14.

'They will rise by 1 per cent in the two years after that but that's half the rate of inflation forecast by the Office for Budget Responsibility in 2014–15 and 2015–16.'

Other benefits affected include: Jobseeker's Allowance, Employment & Support Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit, Maternity Allowance, Statutory Sick Pay/Maternity/Paternity and Adoption Pay.

SNP Finance Minister John Swinney criticised 'ill-thought-out welfare reform', but gave a qualified welcome to funding for infrastructure projects and shelving of plans for a 3p fuel duty increase. Defending his Autumn Statement, George Osborne said abandoning austerity cuts now 'would be a disaster for the UK'.



Herbs with verve

Demand for 24 unique Herb Growing Kits greatly outstripped supply in the run-up to Christmas at Drummond CHS.

S3 students studying for the newly introduced Environmental Science qualification worked across subject areas to make and sell the kits. Proceeds of £120 will go to replace garden equipment, compost and seeds damaged or stolen during the summer holidays. Happily the greenhouse has now been returned to full working order and will be well used in the coming year.

Entertaining coverage of the £5 kits' production can be seen on the school website: [<http://bit.ly/KzvhpK>].



RESOLVE

All I know is, there must come times more wondrous which will set white horses dancing, in our nostrils the fragrance of far islands.

Stewart Conn

This poem is taken from Stewart Conn's collection *Estuary*, recently published by Mariscat Press, ISBN 978 0 946588 63 3.

Broughton: Where's it gone?

Regular readers will be aware of *Spurtle's* long-standing efforts to preserve a sense of geographical and historical continuity in how Broughton is defined.

The stump of the former barony has been greatly buffeted about in recent years by disintegrating ward and constituency boundaries, the arbitrary hiving-off of areas according to architectural style, and the seemingly ceaseless southward expansion of the administrative fiefdom of Leith.

The situation now appears to be changing. In the Council's interactive online map showing Neighbourhood Partnership areas [<http://bit.ly/uO7fhV>], the place name 'Broughton' appears in close-up roughly where one would expect to find it: over Drummond Community High School.

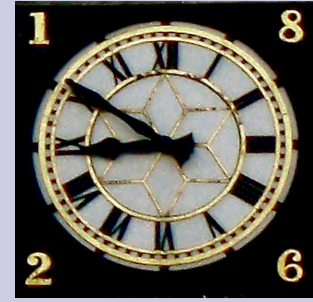
Pan out a little, however, and the authorities' latest baffling vision becomes clear. Bellevue is now in Canonmills. East Claremont Street residents had better start putting out fish for the herons. Equally odd, the Botanic Garden has moved into the park across the road, whilst its former site is no longer in Inverleith but appears as Azaleas.

'Where,' we asked the correspondent who first brought these anomalies to our attention, 'does this leave the rest of Spurtleshire?'

'Probably,' she replied non-committally, 'in the overlap between Corstorphine and Portobello.'



Briefly



The clock atop Broughton St Mary's Parish Church was long stuck at **nine-to-nine** in 2012. Last month, though, it was fixed just in time for the New Year. Like many old mechanisms serviced by Ritchie's, this one is temperamental and suffers from a nervous tick.

A **social media surgery** (experts advising for free on all things **twitter, Facebook and Instagram** to non-experts curious, inexperienced and incompetent) will start at **5.30pm on Mon. 21 Jan in McDonald Rd Library**.

Police appealed for witnesses after a pedestrian **on the pavement** was struck by a vehicle and later died. Forty-three-year-old Bellevue resident Gavin Fulton was hit by a northbound vehicle on **Dundas Street near Heriot Row** at around 1.24am on Sat 8 Dec. A 50-year-old Musselburgh man was later charged with causing death by dangerous driving while under the influence of drink or drugs, and appeared at Edinburgh Sheriff Court on 10 Dec.

A wide range of introductory, weekend and evening classes is available at **Edinburgh Printmakers** on Union Street this year, as well as some short 'taster' courses available at short notice. Find out more at: [<http://bit.ly/UjGURd>].

The **City Centre/Leith Neighbourhood Partnership** has a new 'Manager - Operations': **Ian Buchanan** will develop and deliver services including Housing, Community Safety and Local Environment, and sits on the Leith NP Board. **Mike Penny**, meanwhile, is now 'Manager - Development', for the City Centre, and whilst sitting on the latter's NP Board will try to improve its 'appearance and feel'. Perhaps he should bring his own cushions.

TG Tip 3 - *If you end up with extraneous 2013 diaries or calendars, use one as a workout diary to help track exercise. If you enter a race, put it in this diary so you can structure your training. Otherwise, mark in significant dates to help keep you motivated. Remember to chart your progress too!*

New plans for the **Shrubhill gap-site** will go on public display at McDonald Rd. On **23-4 January (4-8pm)**, staff will be on hand to explain, but the drawings will remain in place for a **further 2 weeks afterwards**. See *Breaking news* (4.12.12).

Old Broughton on a plate

George Washington Wilson (1853-1908) was a distinguished and successful Scottish photographer, particularly of landscapes. Aberdeen University obtained his collection in the 1950s, and it is now viewable online, for free, in extraordinary detail.

One image of 'Edinburgh from the Calton Hill Looking to Granton' - eerily devoid of people - covers much of north Edinburgh: [<http://bit.ly/U7yOuc>].

In addition to the decrepit underparts of the foregrounded Greenside slum (including Duff's bar selling Brandy and Ales), of interest is the congested upper section of Broughton Street south of York Place. The narrowness of the road in front of the cathedral, the lack of vista, evidences the Catholic Church's reluctance to choose a site or structure which might draw hostile attention to itself.

Further north on Broughton Street is the towering steeple of St Mary's Free Church at the junction of Albany Street. Sandpits beyond Bellevue Terrace are just visible, as is Warriston House beyond Canonmills.

Bellevue comprises mostly one side of East Claremont Street. To the east of today's Melgund Terrace, buildings which once housed the defunct zoo can be seen. Those at the top of today's West Annandale Street were an aviary and monkeyhouse. Beyond the Water of Leith, the headstones and Episcopalian chapel of Warriston Cemetery are visible, as is Warriston House.

Few tenements yet appear on East London Street, and the roof of Gayfield House stands in isolation. Incomplete work on the roof of the Catholic Apostolic Church on Mansfield Place (notably on the narthex) suggests the photo dates from c. 1885.

See also *Breaking news* (1.11.10; 26.1.12; 12.12.12). *AM*



What next for Rodney Street triangle?

After three months (when the works permit was for a week), the gas mains replacement at the junction of Canonmills, Eyre Place, Rodney Street and Broughton Road has been completed, writes *David Watt*. But not the cleaning-up.

The triangular 'garden' opposite the Stag's Head pub has been left in a state like the Somme battlefield. The area, with its solitary tree and overgrown ivy, has long been a dumping ground for rubbish and one wonders how it can be improved.

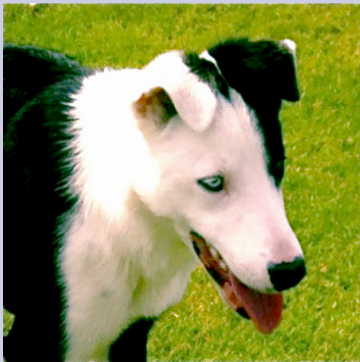
If the tree were kept, perhaps a seat could be placed - further up Rodney Street are two memorial benches, and a third here would provide an additional resting place for the elderly (like myself) making the upward ascent.

If the triangle were completely abolished, the pavement outside the Italian florist could be made wider as at present 40 per cent of it is blocked by the display of flowers and shrubs on sale. The two black wheelie-bins could be moved to the triangle, giving southbound cars and buses turning left from Broughton Road more room to turn into Rodney Street.

Do *Spurtle* readers have further ideas for this problematic spot?



Moreover ...



Fresh from the countryside, sheepdog Glen was visiting friends in Dublin St this Hogmanay when an early firework salvo from the castle put him to flight. His owners searched high and low before contacting the *Spurtle* on 2 Jan. Our **social media campaign** spread like wildfire, and – following numerous sightings in Port Seton, 13 miles away – on 3 Jan he was attracted by his owner's **whistle commands** and reunited, unharmed (*Breaking news*, 2–3.1.13). An evening **tabloid** forgot to mention *Spurtle's* involvement in its write-up of 4 Jan.

Gustavo Pardo of Artisan Roast on Broughton St collected this year's **Glenfiddich Spirit of Scotland Award** for services to food and drink last month (Issue 213). **Top Scot** was **Michael Forbes**, the Aberdeenshire farmer who refused to sell land to Donald Trump.

New Age Developers Ltd seek planning permission (Ref. 12/04302/FUL) for **6 maisonettes and 13 flats** on land 42 metres north of 117 Bellevue Rd (next to the bottom playground at **Broughton Primary School**). See *Breaking news* (11.12.12).

Flood prevention contractors Lagan have issued a completion date for the **new ramp** linking St Mark's Park to Warriston Road by the Water of Leith: **March 2013**. A *Spurtle* observer is unconvinced, however, noting how much **reinforced concrete work** remains to be done; a difficult job in any protracted spell of very cold weather.

Locals report much reduced traffic across the **Dryden Terrace** bridge now stone crushing on the **Shrub Place** site has ceased (Issue 213). Crummocks are 'just' using the area for storage, and the noisy, fume-emitting generator has stopped. **Failure to secure the site** by closing gates at night has been reported to the **police and Health and Safety Executive**.

Mrs Edna Miller – thank you for your generous subscription. Please drop us a line saying **where you would like copies delivered**.

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Alison Johnstone MSP for Lothian Region



On the 1st and 3rd 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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