

Spurtle



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February
2021

No 303

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BROUGHTON'S INDEPENDENT STIRRER Free

BANK TO QUIT PICARDY PLACE

The Bank of Scotland's Greenside branch at 6 Picardy Place will close on 26 April 2021.

BoS says that even before the national Lockdown, personal customers were turning to Internet and Telephone Banking, other branches, and the Post Office instead.

Although personal and business usages here are above that of a typical BoS branch, by 14% and 7% respectively, transactions had fallen in the year to March 2020 (see panel).

BoS says its decision followed an impact analysis which covered customer choices, alternative branches, public transport, and the effect 'on our customers including those who may need additional support'.

The nearest alternative branches will be at 300 Lawnmarket, which is about a 20-minute walk for an able-bodied person; and 75 George Street, which is slightly further away but can be reached on foot in 15 minutes.

The cashpoint machines will also close, with free-to-use alternatives available at Lifestyle Express on Broughton Street, the Omni Centre, and the ex-Royal Bank of Scotland on Blenheim Place.

These details have been drawn from Part 1 of the Branch Review [bit.ly/35Fvx2U]; Part 2 will be available 'at least 2 weeks before closure'.

Spurtle is in no position to judge Lloyds Banking Group's case for the decision, but the result will surely inconvenience local residents and the business community, and represents another blow to the traditional high street. If nothing else, closure of the cashpoint machines seems short-sighted given how the new tram stop will focus footfall here in future.

Branch usage compared to a year ago

Services	Personal	Business
Counter transactions	↓26%	↓34%
Self Service Zone or machine transactions	↓13%	↓37%
Cash machine transactions	↓17%	↓5%

Branch usage compared to a typical Bank of Scotland branch

LIDDALL GOES A LONG WAY



You're likely to see a lot of Ben Liddall over coming weeks. He aims to run 1,042 miles over 100 days between 1 January and 10 April to raise money for the My Name's 5 Doddie Foundation and MND Scotland. The 17-year-old pupil at Trinity Academy had a serious cycling accident last summer, and during an enforced rest afterwards he decided to complete his first marathon within a month of recovery. He has not looked back since. A passionate rugby player and fan, Ben now aims to run a distance equivalent to that between Murrayfield and Twickenham and back, taking in the Aviva in Dublin and the Principality in Cardiff en route. All money raised will go towards funding research into curing Motor Neurone Disease, plus practical, financial and emotional services for sufferers across Scotland. You can visit his Just Giving Page here [bit.ly/3n00icn] and follow his progress on Twitter at @bens100days.

COVID IN SPURTLESHIRE

Public Health Scotland publishes weekly statistics on the number of Covid-related deaths in granular neighbourhoods called Intermediate Zones. Visit [tabsoft.co/3nVhTyS], click 'View cases by neighbourhood' then, under 'Select local authority', choose City of Edinburgh. Be warned: the website is glitchy and annoying to use.

The seven neighbourhoods which include parts of Spurtleshire are (populations in brackets): Broughton South (4,871); Broughton North & Powderhall (4,359); Canonmills & New Town North (3,254); Inverleith, Goldenacre & Warriston (3,899); New Town East & Gayfield (2,852); Pilrig (3,576); Stockbridge (5,805).



Based on people tested between 12 and 18 January, the number of new positive Covid-19 cases was as follows (equivalent rate per 100k in brackets): BS, 7 (143.7); BNP, 0-2; CNN, 3 (92.2); IGW 3 (76.0); NTEG, 0-2; P, 0-2; S, 4 (68.9). The figures across all of Edinburgh were 670 (127.6); across all of Scotland 10,949 (200.4).

Make of this what you will. Not everyone is convinced by the quality, completeness, or consistency of Covid statistics. While we wait to be vaccinated, the best advice remains: Hands, Face, Space.

THUMBS UP FOR BONNINGTON BUILD-TO-RENTS

Leith Central Community Council finds revised plans for 453 build-to-rent residential units in Bonnington 'broadly acceptable' (20/01932/FUL).

The new development, which also includes 5 retail/office spaces and a Bike Café, is proposed for the site bounded by Bonnington Rd and Bonnington Rd Lane. LCCC approves of how the statutory 25% affordable housing (113 build-to-rent units) is 'pepper-potted' across the locations rather than lumped together as a ghetto. However, it calls for perfect transparency on the level at which rents are set.

The Council has yet to determine the application, but PLATFORM, which will own and manage the properties, hopes work can start in December 2021 and end in 2024.

NEW AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION

Broughton resident Joy Hendry is the winner of the Scottish Poetry Library's inaugural Outstanding Contribution to Poetry in Scotland award.

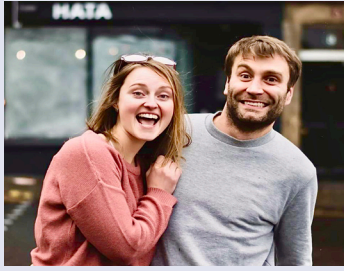
The honour recognises those whose contribution is not restricted to writing, such as publishers, translators, and editors.



Hendry – herself a writer and critic – has edited the literary magazine *Chapman* since 1976, bringing to the world's attention both established and emerging Scottish writers of fiction, poetry, and essays. She says she was drawn to poetry from the age of 7 before starting to edit it 'aged a mere 18 or so, an upstart in this strange world'.

She concludes, 'The news of this award means I can move forward as myself as an individual, very much a part of my community, encouraged and inspired. I am very, very grateful for this.'

Briefly



Welcome to Hata, a new café on **Rodney St** run by Agata Rudzka and Andrew Rennie. The name is a contraction of the (unpronounceable to most Scots) **Polish word chata**, which carries senses of homely, cottage and cot. Expect awesome porridge, great granola, soup, salads, fresh homemade deli sandwiches, amazing cakes, and ‘super-tasty’ coffee. We wish them every success in challenging times.

Shop premises at **50A Broughton St**, available to let since the departure of **Concrete Wardrobe**, are now under offer. More when we have it.

The **Quaich Project** (Issue 293) aims to upgrade **W Princes St Gardens** and create a world-class performance venue, say its supporters. Or **commercialise and ruin it**, say its detractors. Whichever side you stand on, the QP is unlikely to progress soon owing to **Covid-related lack of interest** from potential funders. Over the last month we have heard it described by observers as ‘hibernating’, ‘thoroughly mothballed’, and ‘pretty much dead’.

The Scotsman and *Edinburgh Evening News* changed hands in Dec when **National World** bought JPI Media. Both titles have experienced great uncertainty since **Johnston Press** went into administration in Nov 2018. A welcome first step would be to **hire more journalists**.

GBT Health & Wellbeing left its HQ at **9 Howe Street** for more accessible premises in Duncan Pl in Sept. The 3-storey Category A-listed property will now be **returned to residential use** – with current proposals (20/05698/LBC) including: 4 bedrooms, study, drawing room, sitting room, utility room, kitchen, bath, 4 showers, and **5 toilets**. Someone is feeling flush.

LCCC’s chair **Charlotte Encombe** recommended at last month’s meeting the recent annual lecture by Cockburn Association Chair **Cliff Hague**, entitled ‘Whose Festival is it Anyway?’ [bit.ly/3sJVM1U]. Ward 12’s Cllr **Amy McNeese-Mechan** then at some length asserted the **economic importance** of culture to the capital.

New Town & Broughton CC and Leith Central CC have jointly called for changes to the pedestrian crossing at **Leopold Pl**. The aim is not to create a Checkpoint Charlie between their two areas, but to allow **greater social distancing** than is currently available within the fenced central refuge.

Two short-stay (1-hour) parking areas have been created on **Leith Walk** after requests by local businesses. They are between **Casselbank and Kirk Sts**; and between **Pilrig St and Middlefield**.

Locals rally against Dundas Street interloper

Dundas St and Fettes Row residents have opposed plans to demolish properties at 108–14/116 Dundas St and replace them with a mixed residential and retail development (20/05645/FUL; 20/05646/CON).

They dispute whether MMMARS Dundas Ltd’s justification for matching the tenemental street line to the north has any merit, and call for softening trees to be retained. They claim the proposals breach numerous standards set out in the Council’s Edinburgh Design Guide and relevant legislation.

Whereas the developer describes proposed facades as seeking to ‘complement and reinterpret the historic rhythm and pattern of the neighbouring buildings’, local critics who contacted the *Spurtle* see them as ‘oppressive, unimaginative, and unwanted’ (see p. 40 here [bit.ly/3sAuB9X]).

They go on to note serious impacts on neighbours’ daylight and views, and fear local businesses at pavement-level would be squeezed out by competition from multinational chains.

In short, residents allege the application is ‘clumsy, overbearing, and unsympathetic’. They say it: misjudges and mischaracterises the area; would replace the area’s best features with ‘banal, formulaic and uninspired buildings’; and deploys a selective interpretation of local history to justify its increased built footprint.

Spurtle finds the proposed architecture charmless. We agree that moving the building forward and losing trees would spoil the micro-neighbourhood, and would also contradict earlier Council efforts to emphasise this junction as a gateway into the New Town. We have yet to be persuaded that sustainable adaption of the existing structures is impossible.

A Council determination is expected by 15 April.



Last-minute tweaks too minor to satisfy

Revisions have been made to plans for the New Town Quarter site between Dundas St, Eyre Pl and Fettes Row/Royal Cres [bit.ly/3sIKawq]. The changes entail:

- greater distance between office block and Fettes Row
- reduced massing to top floor, improving view from Dundonald St
- greater use of natural stone on Fettes Row and Eyre Pl elevations, and on the path through park
- refinements to Dundas St and Eyre Pl elevations.

NTBCC regards these changes as positive, but irrelevant to other concerns about ‘excessive’ height, intrusive proximity, effects on nearby parking, and loss of trees. Recent unrelated felling of sick trees has already demonstrated how reduced foliage impacts King George V Park.



Events, dear boy, events

Leith Central Community Council’s response to the Council consultation on use of public spaces includes six principal suggestions.

- Large events should be restricted to areas with hard ground surfaces.
- Events in parks should be limited to a maximum percentage of total area; perhaps 20%.
- Events in parks should not be staged during school holidays.
- There should be clearer rules on preventing damage to park amenity, e.g. trees, plants, grass, soil.
- Street markets should be spread across the city rather than concentrated in one location.
- Edinburgh Council should drive a harder bargain to improve financial returns from use of public space.

Old Royal High School future – launch of a new phase



Last month, developers behind proposals to turn the old Royal High School into a luxury 125-room hotel failed in an attempt to extend their contract with the Council by 3 years. They wanted that time to devise new plans for a 75-bedroom ‘alternative’. That ship has sailed.

Instead, the Council will put a long-term lease for the property out for procurement. Councillors opted not to enter into another exclusive contract – this time with backers of St Mary’s Music School – since they want to test the market in order to achieve the best use and price for this much loved, Category A-listed, financial millstone. The coalition of Edinburgh World Heritage, Cockburn Association, and New Town & Broughton Community Council broadly welcomes the new re-start, so long as conserving and enhancing heritage value is central to any eventual solution.

Whilst Urbanist Hotels and Duddingston House Properties may reapply later, it is the Royal High School Preservation Trust which sounds chirpier. It already has planning consent to create an improved home here for the music school, and has considerable funding and a business plan in place to make this a reality.

It remains to be seen how many other developers will consider taking on such a wonderful but problematic building in this difficult economic climate.

Time to commemorate Catherine

In April 2012, we profiled the life of Charles Dickens's wife, née Catherine Hogarth (1815–79), who was born in the heart of Broughton [bit.ly/2XVN031]. She and her family are associated with three local addresses: 8 Hart Street (1815–20); 2 Nelson Street (1820–28); and her last domicile, 19 Albany Street (1828–31).

In 1831, the family moved to London, where her father, George Hogarth, W.S., had been appointed editor of the *Evening Chronicle*, for which Dickens was then a journalist. Subsequently, Catherine and Dickens married and she bore his 10 children in a life which was often fraught and ended unhappily for her.

Though she never returned to Edinburgh, she must have looked back on her early life with nostalgia for, by all accounts, hers was a happy childhood. She might have been particularly attached to 2 Nelson Street had she known that today No. 4 is highlighted with a plaque devoted to the poet George Garioch (1909–81), who is universally regarded as one of the great celebrants of Auld – and new – Reekie. Surely, of Mrs Dickens's three Edinburgh addresses, 2 Nelson Street should be accorded an equally deserved and pleasing plaque? CEC please note!—JRM



Briefly



This keen-eyed killer was photographed in a **Bellevue** treetop around the middle of January. It seemed enthused by the new year's (perhaps temporary) **abundance of tits**. According to readers, sparrow-hawks have previously been spotted in **Broughton Pl, Cockburn Ter, Cornwallis Pl, Drummond Pl, E. Claremont St, Forth St, London St, Rosslyn Ter**, and the **Botanics**. Any other sightings?

If you enjoy minutely detailed, **migraine-inducing plans** of transport infrastructure, follow this link [bit.ly/3q01KtH]. There you will find everything you could wish to know (and more) about **OLE poles**, TEC cabinets, cable/ducting trenches, pipes, inspection chambers, and drainage channels for the new tram stop at **Picardy Pl**.

For those who like their journalism local, relevant, and at least **111 years too late**, these are good times. A second series of **'News from the Mews'** – this time covering New Town backstreets during the reign of **King Edward VII** – is now being published on our website each Sunday.

In a Twitter poll run by Toronto-based **Crappy Cheapo Architecture** in January, the prize for worst new building of 2020 went to Edinburgh's own **Golden Turd**. The AA Hotel won 35% of the vote, beating strong competition from around the world. See @CheapoCrappy.

The paper and magazine rounds of the Dundas St branch of Margiotta Food & Wine have recently been taken over by Canonmills Newsagents at **3 Howard St**. **Mohammed Anwar** has operated here for nearly 20 years, and sees the **7-days-a-week delivery** side of the business – including milk, rolls, and other groceries – as very much a community service. 'We all have to **look after each other** in these troubling times,' he told *Spurtle*. 'I think deliveries can be really useful for older people, especially during Covid when many of them can't get out as much.' For details, **Tel. 556 1461**.

It's back to the future as concrete panels in the boundary wall between **Register House and James Craig Walk** are to be replaced by Derbyshire sandstone of the kind already used for the **New Waverley** development across the valley (20/05380/FUL). **Existing stone wall** sections will be cleaned and repointed. **Lights and railings** will be upspruced.

February Light

Four-thirty, and the sun strikes slant into our eyes. At the pond, a patch of reeds rattles a dry prelude to dusk.

In that wind-clang, three male bullfinches drop into a rowan, their livery of black, grey and pink so neat they put me in mind of a child's wooden puzzle, the pieces cut with a fretsaw, sanded to a smooth fit.

A party of redwing flies into the wood, rusty flanks we feel we could blow on as if they were embers, warming us into spring.

Imogen Forster

Breaking news

A report to the Transport & Environment Cmte in late January contained new Spaces for People recommendations:

- (1) Convert advisory cycle lanes into segregated ones between Bellevue and Canonmills;
- (2) Reduce northbound Rodney St lane to widen footways on both sides;
- (3) Partly remove railings at Warriston Rd Jcnct. Better Broughton campaigners welcome the proposals. See [bit.ly/3iDyGPM].

At fault with the malt

Home deliveries by couriers unfamiliar with the locality are nothing new, as the following article in the Caledonian Mercury for January 1860 makes clear.

A few days previous, a boy in the employment of a grocer in Greenside was sent to deliver three bottles of whisky to a house in Broughton Place. The boy had been a very short time in the city and not being well acquainted with the locality he accosted a man in Broughton Street and asked to be directed to Broughton Place.

The man inquired the number to which the boy was going; and the boy having told him, his enquirer in the most natural tone possible said well that's lucky for that's where I live and I presume that's the whisky I ordered?

The unsuspecting errand-runner replied that it was and gave over the whisky. Of course, on his return to the shop the poor lad discovered he had been conned. However, the police tracked the whisky to the house of James Reid, a well-known Broughton Street thief.—*Barclay Price*

Death of controversial activist

News came just before Christmas of the death of John Hein, aged 63.

Many in these parts remember him as a softly spoken and determined community activist. He had been instrumental in establishing the Edinburgh Pride movement, was sometime editor/publisher of *ScotsGay* magazine, and a CAMRA enthusiast. He stood for the Liberal Party in the General Election of 2010 and in the Council election of 2012. He was a long-time member of Leith Central Community Council, and from 2011–17 proved an effective chairperson with a remarkable flair for delegation. On limited acquaintance, *Spurtle* enjoyed his deadpan wit, and found him variously thoughtful, quirky, mellifluous, and unsettling.

Then in 2018, the *Herald* revealed Hein's (legal) business facilitating Scottish limited partnerships. Many of these were shell companies operated by money launderers and other criminals [bit.ly/2LT6SB4]. He denied prior knowledge of such illegality, any personal wrongdoing, or indeed profit.

Tributes followed his demise, until, late in 2020, via social media, plausible allegations emerged of Hein's involvement with the Paedophile Information Exchange. *Spurtle* later found that in a *Scottish Daily Mail* report of 2014 [bit.ly/2LWHiLv] Hein acknowledged having joined PIE as a teenager, whilst denying any sexual interest in children. His explanation there seems incomplete and unconvincing.

These posthumous revelations have left many who thought they knew him (if only a little) feeling shocked, disappointed, and appalled.—*AM*



Moreover ...



This sinister presence at the southern end of **Rodney St Tunnel** marks a welcome return to form by local **spray-paint warriors**. They have, over recent months, spent more time **flying each other** or defacing tags than producing anything of interest. Now though – in an age of fake news, false claims, and loopy conspiracy theories – this **wolf in sheep's clothing** serves as a reminder not to take everything or everyone at face value.

Edinburgh's Covid-delayed **Low Emission Zone** may not be in place before Feb 2022, but the Scottish Govt is already taking steps to encourage the **most polluting vehicles** off our roads. Means-tested grants of £2k–2.5k are available for businesses and individuals to **remove and improve**. Micro-businesses can benefit from a £1M fund to retrofit **HGVs, LGVs, and taxis**. More at [bit.ly/2M2DvvW].

Legal & General Investment has applied for listed building consent to selectively demolish 1980s **Debenhams department-store structures** behind a retained listed facade, along with **external and internal alterations** including extensions, to form a hotel and associated uses and ancillary works, at **109–12 Princes Street and 144–50 Rose St** (20/05442/LBC). A CEC decision is expected by 6 Feb.

Back in the day when **St Mark's Park** was all arctic tundra and herds of mammoths daundered up Broughton St in search of **Greenside moss** (i.e. pre-1974), inner-city **frost forests** on windows and car bonnets were nothing much to write home about. Now, though, **in warmer times**, they are. These marvels form when regular fractal bifurcation of ice crystals is disrupted by **minute imperfections** on an otherwise smooth surface. **Dust, salt, or detergent residue** will do it. We thank reader Steph Borer for this image, captured during **January's cold snap**.



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LEITH CENTRAL COMMUNITY COUNCIL

A forum for local people who want to engage with and work for their local community.

Participate in local democracy.

Make representations to City of Edinburgh Council, other public bodies and private agencies on everything that matters locally.

Next meeting: 7pm on Mon. 17 February, McDonald Road Library.

<https://leithcentralcc.co.uk>

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Surgeries

Every first Friday 1-2pm Constituency office 166 Great Junction St	Every third Friday 1-2pm Stockbridge Library
Every second Friday 3.30-4.30pm McDonald Road Library	Every last Friday 4-5pm Royston/Wardieburn Community Centre

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ACE IT
 IT coaching for the over 50s

Edinburgh-based charity specialising in coaching the over 50s on their digital devices: smartphones, laptops, tablets... Free of charge.

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COVID-19/Coronavirus Update:
 Because of Coronavirus/Covid-19, and in accordance with the law and advice, my office is closed to the public until further notice. My team and I are working remotely and continue to assist constituents as normal.

Weekly Virtual/Phone Surgeries:
 I have also had to cancel my weekly face-to-face advice surgeries. I will be holding telephone or electronic surgeries on Friday's. Please leave a voicemail or email my office to book a 15 minute surgery slot and someone in my team will get in touch to confirm a time.

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The Scottish Parliament
 Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

December 2020

NEW TOWN & BROUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Representing locals' views to City of Edinburgh Council.

Tell us what you think and make a difference.
 Next meeting: to be confirmed.
 Contact us at
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