

West Blacket Association

& Neighbourhood Watch

Newsletter November 2007

Annual General Meeting

The West Blacket Association AGM will be held on Tuesday December 4th at the Unionist Club, 5 Duncan Street. All residents welcome. Invitations have been extended to all four Councillors in the new Southside/Newington ward, and to Community Police Officers, though it is unlikely all will be able to attend.

730pm	<i>Refreshments and membership renewals</i>
800pm	<i>Chairman's report</i>
	<i>Treasurer's report</i>
	<i>Election of Officers & Committee</i>
830pm	<i>Local History Group proposal</i>
	<i>Grange/Prestonfield Community Council</i>
	<i>Future of West Blacket Neighbourhood Watch</i>
930pm	<i>Close</i>

Treasurer's Report 2006-7

Our membership has increased this year to 44 households (some 79 members). Subscription income is £123. We also received a generous donation of £47 from two members of the association. We continue to subscribe to the Cockburn Association. Our other main expense this year is the printing cost of the Newsletter. (Hosting fees for our website are not due until 2008.) I anticipate a surplus of around £100 for the year. Total bank and cash balances will be close to £590. Full details will be available at the AGM.

Membership

Subscriptions for the year to November 2008 remain at £2/individual or £3/household and may be paid at the AGM or, if you are unable to attend, to Evelynne Hill. Newsletters are delivered to all residents, but some events may be advertised only to paid-up members.

Please return this slip to Evelynne Hill, WBA Treasurer, 37 Upper Gray Street

Name :

Address :

£2 enclosed

£3 enclosed

About the West Blacket Association

The Upper Gray Street Association was set up in 1966 to object to the proposed demolition of a Georgian villa at what was then 20, now 22, Upper Gray Street. The association subsequently expanded, as the West Blacket Association, to become the community association for the part of the Blacket Conservation Area not 'within the gates' and therefore not represented by the Blacket Association. The two associations are distinct though often confused. We have prepared a welcome leaflet for new residents, explaining the objectives of the West Blacket Association, and with other useful information. This can be found on our website www.westblacket.org.uk : if you do not have internet access, printed copies are available on request.

Our website has been under its present name, which we own, for nearly 2 years. It is not an elaborate site, but includes information under the following headings -

- Information for New Residents (Welcome Leaflet)
- West Blacket Archives (Newsletters, Minutes of Annual General Meetings)
- West Blacket History (Local History provided by WBA residents)
- West Blacket Contacts (Contact details for WBA Committee, Councillors, MSP, MPs)

The website should be accessible from any web browser, without special features, but some documents in .PDF format require Acrobat Reader which is freely available.

In a Google search for 'West Blacket', the top 12 items are links to our website.

Grange/Prestonfield Community Council

The Community Council is a statutory elected body, set up when at least 20 registered electors petition the local council, and provided that sufficient individuals and amenity associations are willing to stand for election, under the Local Government Scotland Act 1973. There were already 45 Community Councils within the City of Edinburgh, each with between 15 and 30 possible members. Our area was one of few, if any, not so represented, probably because of the pre-existence of amenity associations, such as the West Blacket, Blacket and Grange Associations, many of whose functions appear to be duplicated by the Community Council.

The Grange/Prestonfield Community Council, now established, has 16 places for individually elected members and 8 for members nominated by local amenity associations. The amenity associations nominating representatives were: Edinburgh and Midlothian Green Party; Prestonfield Tenants & Residents Association; The Craigmillar Park Association; West Blacket Association. Neither the Blacket Association nor the Grange Association has nominated membership, though residents from both areas are elected members. The GPCC has held its inaugural meeting on October 24th, at which interim officers were elected, and proposes to hold about 10 meetings each year, which will be advertised and open to the public. Some members feel the name of the CC does not well describe its area which includes most of Newington, but only a small part of the Grange. The name may be changed if agreement on a new name can be reached.

In a parallel development, representatives of the amenity associations within the new Newington/Southside ward are proposing to hold regular meetings, provisionally 2 or 3 times per year, with our four City of Edinburgh Councillors.

Elections to The West Blasket Association Committee

Nominations for the offices of Chairman, Hon Treasurer and Hon Secretary are cordially invited: these should be sent to the current Secretary, with confirmation of the nominee's agreement to stand for election at the Annual General Meeting.

The West Blasket Association, as ever, welcomes new blood, new ideas & new enthusiasm. Most of the work is done by the Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary. Other committee members need only commit to one or two hours on a week-night evening, at intervals of 6 to 10 weeks, depending on the pressure of business. If you are interested, please get in touch with any member of the current committee, or just turn up to the AGM.

Members who are willing to become members of the Committee may stand for election, or may be co-opted without election at the discretion of the Committee.

The WBA Officers & Committee for 2006-7 are:

Chairman: Brian Charlesworth, 39 Minto Street. 662 1725
brian.charlesworth@ed.ac.uk

Hon Secretary: Mike Hunter, 40 Upper Gray Street. 667 1767
dr.m.j.hunter@gmail.com.

Hon Treasurer: Evelynne Hill, 37 Upper Gray Street. 667 0675.

Neighborhood Watch: Jane Griffiths

Other Members:

Irene Brown, 32 Minto Street

Ian Carter, 3 Bartholomew House, 12 Duncan Street

Jeff Robinson, 1 Middleby Street

Chris Theobald, 8a South Gray Street

Rosemary Wake, 9b Middleby Street

Jeff & Jane Robinson

Jeff and Jane, having thoroughly enjoyed living in the West Blasket area for 14 years, are now moving to Cheltenham, hoping to complete the move before Christmas. Their participation in the WBA has been much appreciated, many friends they made in the area having enjoyed the benefit of their hospitality. Jeff has served on the Committee and was the chief author of our 'Information for Residents' leaflet.

Neighbourhood Watch in West Blasket

What is its future?

The Neighbourhood Watch was set up more than ten years ago, by very enthusiastic individual residents with extensive support from Lothian & Borders Police, but then quite separate from the West Blasket Association. This arrangement involving some duplication of resources, the Watch was later incorporated into the WBA, with representation on the WBA Committee, while retaining its own group of street representatives for liaison with Community Police Officers, distribution of crime reports etc.

Of the six street representatives listed in our newsletter 12 months ago, James Campbell has now left the area, and those remaining, frustrated by inadequate or at least irregular support by Lothian & Borders Police, have been depleted to only two. Clearly, unless more volunteers come forward, Neighbourhood Watch in West Blasket will not survive. Present members believe there is still a need to alert people to crimes being carried out in the area and to encourage watchfulness generally. And of course some insurers offer lower premiums in NHW areas.

Over to you! What do YOU think? Please bring your views to the AGM.

West Blacket History

The West Blacket Association committee have been discussing ways in which the history content of our website (relatively untouched since 2002) can be expanded.

In recent years various people have collected information from maps, census returns, post office directories and the Scotsman digital archive and Ron Hill talked on local history at our 2003 and 2006 AGMs.

We hope to use this material to produce a 'core' of web pages outlining the early history of the area and the way in which the streets have evolved into what we see today.

Around this 'core' could hang more detailed information and references, with links to external sources, on:

- prominent locations such as Bartholemew House, the Upper Gray Street Tenement and the former Duncan St School
- notable residents such as author Jessie Saxby, the Geikie geologist brothers and the numerous artists.

These pages would provide existing and new residents with a 'feel' for the area and some useful background for anyone researching a building or family in West Blacket.

To help people in their own studies we would give details of relevant published and web-based sources and guidance on potential 'pitfalls' (e.g. changes in street names and house numbering).

A number of people have already indicated willingness to get involved with this project and we are sure that others are keen to join in.

If you are interested, please get in touch with either – Rosemary Wake (9b Middleby Street, phone: 662 4221, email: rwake@tehs.co.uk) or Ron Hill (37 Upper Gray Street, phone: 667 0675, email: r.g.hill@talk21.com).

Meanwhile, do any of you have copies of your deeds? We would be particularly interested in collating details of who built individual properties (and when). And if you have any illustrations or photographs of the area in the last 200 years, that would be a bonus.

Upper Gray Street / Duncan Street Corner

Possible Development?

While the Duncan Street Terrace currently comprises nine houses, John Leslie's map of 1826 shows that a further two were planned for its western end. These houses were never built and, ever since, the site on the Duncan Street / Upper Gray Street corner has been occupied by a range of small business premises. Joiners, decorators, electricians and the motor trade have all occupied parts of the site at various times.

In the 1970s Lilian Martin of 35 Upper Gray Street used one of the buildings next to Devon Cottage as a flower arranging studio and Neil Reid of 27 Upper Gray Street had a pottery kiln in another of these buildings. Around 1978/79 the joiners C Birss & Sons (originally Est 1883) acquired 47 Upper Gray Street from Walkers, Electricians. At that time Rolland, Decorators had a paint store on the corner.

The current owner of 45 Upper Gray Street has planning permission for a small dwelling house there, but has not proceeded, reportedly because he hoped to acquire and develop the whole corner site. C Birss & Sons have now sold No 47 to 'a developer', so we may anticipate such a development. We should welcome this, but must examine any planning submission for inappropriate or over-development.