



Broughton Tolbooth 1582–1829

# BROUGHTON HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

NUMBER 36

WINTER 2015/16

**Unfortunately, other priorities overwhelmed us and we did not manage the second, Summer, edition for 2015 – for which, apologies. And now the first, Winter, edition for 2016 is late arriving – we aim to do it in January and February each year.**

**Ideas or contributions for our next edition?**  
Phone editor John Dickie on 0131–556 0903  
or e-mail [john.dickie@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:john.dickie@blueyonder.co.uk)

## Contents

### Olive Torrance

by John Dickie and Colin Torrance 1

### The Botanic Cottage: stone by stone

by Sutherland Forsyth 3

Renewed thanks to Eileen Dickie for doing the Desktop Publishing, to Alan McIntosh for proof-reading – and to both of them for their advice.

## Olive Torrance

**Society member Olive Torrance died peacefully at Marian House Care Home on 25th September 2015.**

**Her funeral took place at Warriston Crematorium, and included a tribute read by her nephew Colin Torrance.**

Olive was born in 1922. 'Olive's and my male ancestors were all practical men,' says Colin. 'Olive's Dad was chief electrician in the Lyceum; and further back on the Torrance male line are plumbers, joiners and a tinsmith.'

Olive's father died in 1931 when she was only 9. 'On separate occasions my Aunt Betty said his heart was strained during WW1, though I don't know where he served.' Much later, 'when there was a Royal Command performance in the Lyceum, as chief sparky my grandfather worked pretty well non-stop for a fortnight before the performance and this overwork killed him.'

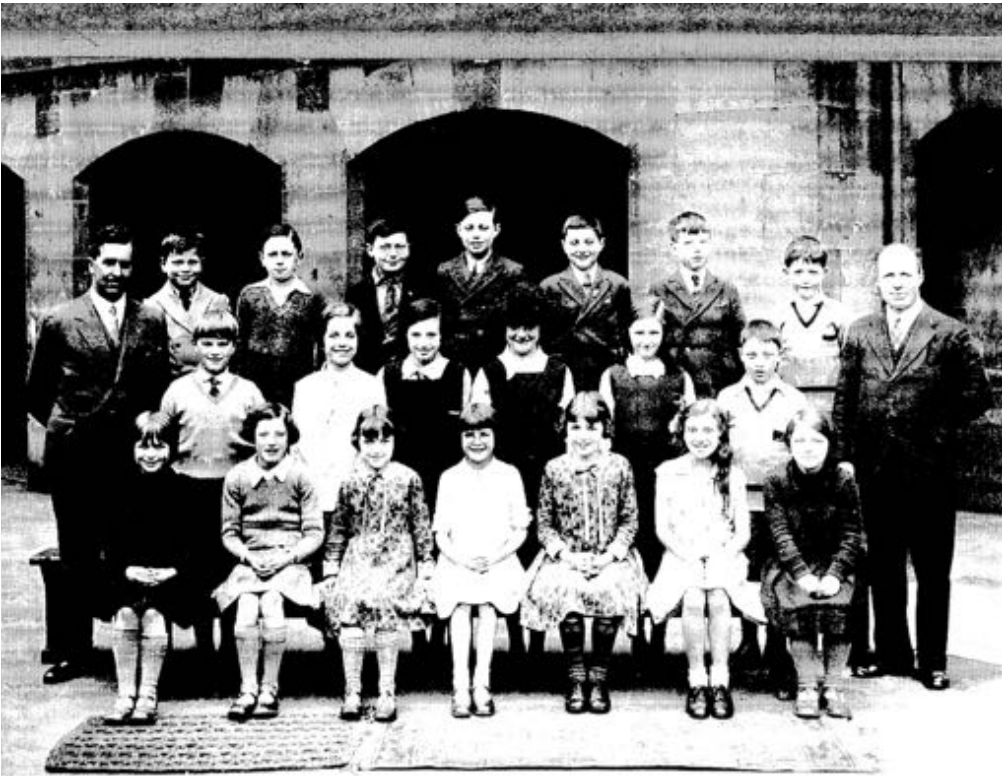
By this time Olive was at primary school, at St James' Episcopal School in Broughton Street (now the Stafford Centre). Our photo, (overleaf), lent to us by Olive to copy, was taken at the rear of the school building, circa 1930. Colin has confirmed that 'Olive is the girl in the middle line 2nd from the left, as you look at them, in the white shirt and tie.' Some years before Olive, our local poet Robert Garioch was a pupil at the same school: thanks to Olive we discovered that Colin was a fan of Garioch – and an interesting correspondence followed.

From St James', Olive went on to Gillespie's. 'In her 1st year there, Muriel Spark was in the 6th year.



*Thanks to Ian Smith for the jpeg of his photo. The family connection? Olive felt a strong bond with her cousin Pearl, who was 'ages with her'; and Pearl was Ian's mother.*

Her famous "Miss Jean Brodie" was one of their teachers. Unlike the slim Maggie Smith who played the part in the film, the real Miss Brodie had more than ample proportions, and was nicknamed Blossom by the girls.'



upbringing of myself and my brother.'

**Some more quotes from Colin's tribute**

When Aunt Betty, Olive's elder sister, and Aunt Olive moved in to Melgund Terrace, Betty had an electric cooker installed – and proudly announced that her father was one of the first people in Edinburgh to have an electric cooker.

I am left-handed, so was Olive, my mother, and so too is my daughter Kirsteen.

In my prime, I was 6 feet 1 inch tall, but I span 6 feet 10 inches. The most comfortable way for me to stand is with my hands behind my back, as Olive

'Her mother died in 1939, just after the start of WW2. Her elder sister Betty kept her at school to finish the year; and take and pass the Civil Service exam.'

'Olive was always active. She played, then refereed, hockey. And she was a Girl Guide, then Captain in the Guides. She was one of the organisers of the first international Girl Guide camp after the war, in Norway in 1947. She always seemed to be bringing home exotic friends; from Norway, Czechoslovakia, Brazil: a real international jet-setter.'

'My parents stayed in Marchmont Crescent, across the Meadows from Olive and Betty in Chalmers Street. So every Sunday after Sunday School we called in to Olive and Betty for coffee; and after cubs and scouts on Friday evenings again Aunt Betty and Aunt Olive's.'

'Olive was often drafted in to help organise my brother Alasdair and my birthday parties. In her own quiet, assertive way, she was a strong influence in the

used to do. So too, my son Torcuill and his son Gregor.

Olive's organisational ability, neatness and correct procedure I see in my daughter Catriona, a lawyer. Her quiet ways, but don't push it too far!!

When I started Scouts, Olive brought me back a scout knife from Norway. I have adapted it into a *sgian dhu*, a prized possession and gift from Olive.

**Olive and the History Society**

Olive attended Society meetings regularly, and always warmly welcomed delivery of the latest edition of the *Newsletter*.

In the build-up to our August 2006 exhibition, starting in February, she was a member of the Exhibition Working Group – attending every meeting we have minutes for on file. Then when the exhibition opened to the public she filled five 3-hour slots in the rota of volunteers to staff it. She also joined the team signed up to move the display stands into the church on the Sunday afternoon before the exhibition opened; and then 'dismantle' on the evening of the day it closed. Very hands-on!

I imagine the photo of Olive's class will appear in any Society exhibition or publication there may be in the future.

AN EXHIBITION OF PHOTOGRAPHS, MAPS AND DOCUMENTS BY  
**BROUGHTON HISTORY SOCIETY**  
 BROUGHTON ST MARY'S CHURCH  
 BELLEVUE CRESCENT  
 EDINBURGH  
 7- 19 AUGUST 2006  
 daily 12- 6pm (8pm Thursdays)  
 Admission free

# The Botanic Cottage: stone by stone

Sutherland Forsyth, Botanic Cottage Community Engagement Co-ordinator



For some – indeed, most – it was a moment they had never been quite sure would happen. A row of over 100 people, aged from 9 to 90+, stood in the Demonstration Garden of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, spades in hand; radio, TV and print journalists were assembled to capture another milestone in the remarkable journey of the Botanic Cottage – it was time to break ground and cut the turf. Over the next two years the Cottage would rise from the ground, looking as good as it had in its Georgian heyday, and ready to open its doors exactly 250 years after the first students were taught in it by Prof. John Hope.

Back in 2007 when a disparate group got together to discuss the fate of the Botanic Cottage, their main hope was to record its history before it was demolished. The Cottage had stood at the entrance to the long lost Leith Walk incarnation of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE), which stood on a five-acre plot from 1763 until it began a three-year move to Inverleith from 1820. Built in 1764-5, the Botanic Cottage served three purposes: firstly, it was the main entrance to the Garden, through the doors in the wing walls on either side of the central section; secondly, it was the home of the principal gardener and his family, the first such resident being John Williamson; thirdly, it was a place of learning, where Prof. John Hope, Regius Keeper of the Garden and Professor of Botany and Materia Medica, would teach

medical students during the height of the Scottish Enlightenment in a special classroom upstairs.

Despite having been designed by two of the greatest architects of the Georgian era – John Adam and James Craig – and its illustrious history as a building of significance to botanical history, the Enlightenment, and the development of the city, by the early 2000s it was threatened with demolition. It was virtually unrecognisable from how it appeared in historic images, with the lime render on the exterior having long since come off, one gable wall lost to a tenement which was stuck on the side of this small house, and, most significantly, the raising of the level of Leith Walk.



The military rampart built as a defence against Oliver Cromwell's army in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century ran the length of Leith Walk, standing high above the public track beside it. The Botanic Cottage was built in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, and with new houses and tenements being built along the road in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the track level was raised to that of the rampart beside it. In the process, the ground floor of the Botanic Cottage was obscured. Only in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century was a bridge built from the new street level to the central window on the first floor of the Cottage, where an entrance was created.

After the Botanics left Leith Walk in the early 1820s, the Cottage became a private home, later tied to the builders merchants David Y. Abbey, then surveyors' offices, and even a van rental shop.

When vandals set it on fire, it was only because neighbours spotted the smoke that it was not totally lost. However, plans were afoot to develop the plot behind it, and this meant that the cottage would fall – and given that previous attempts at getting it listed building status had failed, there appeared to be no hope for the Botanic Cottage.

Fortunately, that intrepid group of campaigners which included local researchers, architects, botanists, enthusiasts and more, decided that something must be done. A grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund was entrusted to the Friends of Hopetoun Crescent Garden. This grant enabled archaeological research on the Botanic Cottage to be done by Glasgow University Archaeology Research Department (GUARD) and detailed historical research to be done, led by Jane Corrie. These produced copious amounts of information to highlight the importance of the Cottage. During these two years the FHCG had great support and guidance from Una Richards of the (then) Alba Conservation Trust and also from Audrey Ovens of the HLF. With guidance from James Simpson, Conservation Architect, the idea of not just recording,



but moving, the building took hold, and soon a trust was formed, and a plan of action put in place. The vision was that once dismantled, the Cottage would be moved stone by stone to the present Botanics, where it would be rebuilt with a purpose reflecting why it was constructed in the first place: an education and community hub. At the heart of the Demonstration Garden, where school, student and community programmes are based, the Cottage would provide shelter, new teaching and cooking spaces, toilets, hand-washing facilities and more.



*The Botanic Cottage Trust*

*Among the key people: middle row left is Dr David Rae (RBGE) and next to him Jane Corrie; front row from L to R: James Simpson, Lord Hope (Chair), Eileen Dickie and Andrew Johnston*

The developer who had been due to demolish the Botanic Cottage became interested in the project, and offered to dismantle it so that it could be moved and rebuilt. The Botanic Cottage Trust was formed, to take responsibility and raise funds for the building before passing it on to the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh.

In 2008 it was painstakingly dismantled, the stones were numbered, and they were taken to the Botanics' nursery, awaiting their new future. Over the following years, the fundraising campaign took off, raising money from trusts, foundations and individuals, with the single largest donor being the Heritage Lottery Fund. By 2014 it was time to rebuild the Botanic Cottage.

Following the turf cutting in April 2014, tenders from various construction companies were reviewed, balancing a range of considerations. The final decision was to award the contract to Maxi Construction, who would oversee the project and work with a number of specialist sub-contractors. In September of that year, archaeologists from Addyman Archaeology did a final survey of the Demonstration Garden site, and then it was time to start digging and laying the foundations.

The team of architects from Simpson & Brown worked to ensure that the building retained its 18<sup>th</sup> century character – and looked as good as it did when first built – but also that it met with modern building specifications. Indeed, despite all of the quoin stones and keystones having been numbered, each roof truss carefully lifted off the original cottage, all rubble put into bags, beams recorded on drawings and much more, the Botanic Cottage is technically a 'new build' and must therefore adhere to any regulations pertaining to a modern building. Needless to say, this presented quite a challenge. Furthermore, there was a need for additional teaching space to make the building as useful as possible for decades to come. The architects cleverly looked at the original plans of the Leith Walk garden, and noticed that works yards and outbuildings



were placed on either side of the Cottage behind the wing wall doors. Using this as their starting point, they took the approximate size of those yards and buildings, and created two new side wings for the Cottage – effectively covered courtyards. Not only this, but archaeological work on the Leith Walk site showed evidence of garden outbuildings being constructed of red brick with pan-tile roofs, and therefore it was decided that these new wings, hidden behind the wing walls, would use those same materials. Essentially, wherever a new addition had to be made, it was done in a way which alluded to and respected what would originally have been there. These side wings had the added benefit of being able to house a potting shed, a classroom, a small store, a boiler room, toilets and a platform lift, ensuring full disabled access to the historic classroom upstairs.



Conservation Masonry led on the rebuilding of the stone walls. With no internal frame, this was house building 18<sup>th</sup> century style! In essence, this was a huge jigsaw puzzle, with numbered stones having to go back in the right place, and



s t o n e  
r u b b l e  
completing  
the rest of  
the walls.  
The stone  
is thought  
to be  
Craigleith  
t y p e  
sandstone,

although the exact quarry is unknown. Where new stone was required, this came from the Hazeldean quarry in Northumberland, as it is believed to be one of the closest matches to Craigleith stone. Throughout the winter and spring of 2015, stonemasons worked to build up the walls, using traditional hot lime mortar, produced by the Scottish Lime Centre.



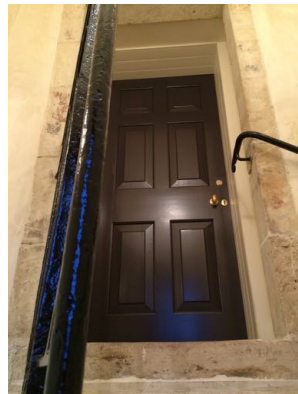
*Aerial view of the Leith Walk dig  
(taken from a cherry picker!)*

Just prior to building work beginning, an archaeology dig took place on the Leith Walk site of the Cottage and part of the lost garden behind it. Led by Addyman Archaeology and with support from a team of volunteers, the dig found a range of wonderful items – from long lost garden paths to cobble stones outside the front of the Cottage, fragments of china used in the house to copious amounts of broken pots. A further dig at the start of 2015 saw Addyman





Archaeology strip the entire site back to its original level, revealing the rich, dark brown soil, the remains of flower beds, paths and more. With this project, it seems that there are always new discoveries to be made!



As spring turned into summer in 2015, other trades became more involved – joiners, bricklayers, electricians, plumbers and more. Seeing the original wooden joists placed back where they had originally been, and then the roof trusses lowered into place, were particularly significant moments, not least because the original makers' marks could still be seen on the wooden beams. Seeing the handmade windows – double glazed but with one layer hand-blown to give a shimmer – slotted into the holes suddenly gave the Cottage eyes, and when the doors followed, it started to make it all feel less like a building site, and more like a home.

One summer's day the stone memorial to John Williamson finally returned to its rightful home. Williamson was the principal gardener (1760–80) who was the first resident of the Cottage and a man who had given two decades of his life to improving the botanic garden. He was murdered by a group of smugglers in September 1780 whilst undertaking his duties as a part-time customs officer. The memorial, commissioned by John Hope and believed to have been designed by James Craig, is thought to have originally sat above the side door of the cottage, but after the garden moved, despite it being taken to Inverleith, it was largely forgotten. Now, with Williamson's home rebuilt, the plaque could be returned to where it was meant to be – above the west door of the cottage. Seeing it there is a very special thing indeed.

The project provided opportunities for students and apprentices of building crafts to visit the site, to meet the architects and craftsmen who were working on this unique construction. A couple of young people were embedded with the team of stonemasons, getting the opportunity to help carve stones, prepare them and help lay them. In total, 47 young people visited the site for 'Apprentice Days' during the build.

At the same time, efforts were made to keep the interested parties and organisations informed of the project, with a series of tours on the scaffolding enabling people to get up close. Furthermore, during the build a public engagement programme saw over 3,500 people attend talks, tours, events and stalls connected with the Cottage and its history; over 1,000 people followed the Cottage Twitter account; over 14,000 people visited the information shed outside the building site to learn more about the project; and 5,500 maps and postcards with garden heritage information inspired by the Cottage were collected by the public.

In late September, 550 people attended a 'Doors Open' weekend at the Cottage, enjoying the chance to step inside the building and hear its stories. It was wonderful to hear people being so enthusiastic about the project and leaving such positive comments, which were greatly appreciated by the teams working hard to finish it off. Another 'Doors Open' day followed on the first of December, as part of the '24 Days of Christmas' advent calendar, where a different building opened its doors each day leading up to Christmas.



to the memory of  
**JOHN WILLIAMSON**  
 who during twenty years of faithful service  
 as Principal Gardener in this place was no less respected  
 for the good qualities suited to his station in life, than  
 esteemed for eminent skill in his profession, this  
 monument is erected by John Hope P.Bot 1781

In December 2015, the Botanic Cottage was highly commended in the annual Georgian Group awards in London, where it was hailed as a '**heroic rescue of a garden building of real historic importance...a magnificent restoration...a triumph of craftsmanship and scholarly research**'. Jane Corrie represented the old Botanic Cottage Trust and the researchers of the cottage history at the ceremony in London along with James Simpson representing the architects, Simon Milne, Regius Keeper of the Botanic, and Brian Watters, the site manager for Maxi Construction (who built the Cottage).

Remarkably, it turned out that the builders were unwittingly following almost exactly the same schedule as the original workmen back in 1764–5, right down to doing some jobs on the same date 250 years later!

After the Christmas break, in January 2016 the Botanic Cottage was officially handed over to RBGE from Maxi Construction. Over the next few months, snagging, finishing and landscaping work took place, with a handful of 'tester' events happening in the building, ahead of the official opening in May 2016.

The Botanic Cottage is a remarkable building. It would not be standing today without the vision, enthusiasm and dedication of so many people, from the original campaigners to the staff of RBGE, the generous funders to the skilled craftsmen who built it. It is rare enough for a building to be moved, but for one as significant as the Cottage, and for it to be rebuilt by the original organisation which first constructed it and to be placed back in its spiritual home, and then used for almost identical purposes to when it was first built, is unique.

Now, the Botanic Cottage is simultaneously the oldest and newest building in the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, and we can't wait to welcome you in.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Thursday 20 May – 11am–12.15pm**

**Digging deeper:  
The archaeology of a long lost garden**

Pre-book at [www.thebotanics.eventbrite.co.uk](http://www.thebotanics.eventbrite.co.uk)

**Thursday 27 May – 11 am–12.15pm**

**Making a vision a reality:  
Meet the architects**

Pre-book at [www.thebotanics.eventbrite.co.uk](http://www.thebotanics.eventbrite.co.uk)

**30 May – OPEN DAY at the Cottage  
The Cottage Garden Gala, 12 noon to 6pm**

Celebrate the Botanic Cottage at our Georgian jamboree! It's time to party like it's 1776 as we celebrate the relocation of the original Botanic Cottage from its Leith Walk site. Bring a picnic and join the RBGE for an afternoon of free music, creative activities and much much more. More info at: [www.rbge.org.uk/whats-on](http://www.rbge.org.uk/whats-on)

*The Friends of Hopetoun Crescent Garden (FHCG) would like to acknowledge the continuous and valued support that Professor Steve Blackmore (Regius Keeper 1999–2013) gave to the whole project. From the very first Botanic Cottage meeting in the RBGE in April 2007 to the formation of the Botanic Cottage Trust in 2009 – he was an excellent advocate of the whole mad/daft idea of rebuilding the Botanic Cottage in the RBGE.*

*Right: May 2009. Professor Blackmore (on the right) after unveiling 'The Story of the Botanic Garden' which is in Hopetoun Crescent Garden. On the left is Douglas Bayne who lived in the Cottage as a boy, and in the centre is Eileen Dickie, then Chair of the FHCG.*





**2007 From this to this 2016**



*Fire damage to the Botanic Cottage in the early 2000s*



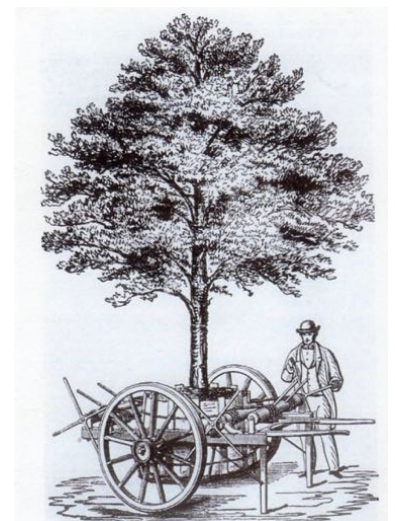
*The wonderful workmen who dismantled the Cottage with so much care*



*The rescued stones and timbers prior to removal to the RBGE nursery*



*Dr John Hope on the left. The only known image of him – from an etching by John Kay, 1786*



*The last gardener in charge of the Leith Walk Garden was William McNab. He masterminded the move to Inverleith – inventing a tree transplanter so that mature specimens did not have to be left behind.*



**Newsletter Circulation**

We print 120 copies of each edition. Around half go to Society members. Eight non-members who have shown a special interest get it regularly; and for each edition one or two on a once-off basis. I'm currently posting it to ten other history groups. And copies go to libraries, schools and local doctors' and dentists' waiting rooms.

**Newsletter Online**

We have a dedicated page of our own on the Broughton community paper's website ([www.broughtonspurtle.org.uk](http://www.broughtonspurtle.org.uk)). On their home page you'll see **Broughton History Society** in the left-hand column: click on that for general Society information, details of meetings, the current edition and previous editions going back to Summer 2007.



