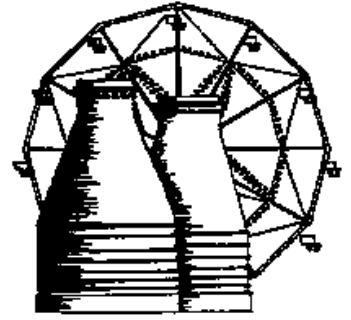


# PORTOBELLO AMENITY SOCIETY

Newsletter - Winter 2012-13



## The Porty Light-Box Project

Some local residents of Portobello may have seen the start of a slow transformation of the old red phone box at the top of Bellfield Street. The phone box, a “K6” model, was decommissioned by BT and has since been adopted by Portobello Community Council on behalf of the local community. Numerous phone boxes have



*Photo: Peter Wraith*

been adopted by villages and communities throughout Scotland, although it is believed this is the first to be adopted within a city.

In 1935, the Post Office commissioned Sir Giles Gilbert Scott to design a new kiosk to mark the Jubilee of King George V. Called the “Jubilee Kiosk” the K6 was made from cast iron, painted red and to be used everywhere. It was introduced in 1936 and it was to be Britain’s standard kiosk for over thirty years. In that time, over 60,000 were erected.

Initially, not everyone liked the red colour. Today, the traditional red telephone box is regarded as a (possibly diminishing) part of the British street scene, but back in the 1930’s a bright red phone box was regarded by some as too visually intrusive.

Previously, telephone boxes were usually cream. After the Second World War, the

Royal Fine Arts Commission was asked to consider the use of red for phone boxes. A trial was undertaken with six kiosks painted in various colours: red; black; Brunswick Green; Light Battleship Grey and Dark Battleship Grey. The conclusion was that red was to be used in normal rural and urban settings, but Dark Battleship Grey to be used in areas of outstanding natural beauty.

An additional source of complaint, north of the border, was that the K6, like the K2 before it, displayed the crown from the Post Office crest. After the coronation of Queen Elizabeth in 1952 the Post Office changed their crest to use St Edward’s crown, which was adopted by the Queen. However, Her Majesty was not the second Queen Elizabeth of Scotland, so the new Post Office crest was not applicable to Scotland. A similar problem applied to the Post Office letter boxes. The solution in 1955 was to cast the K6 with slots, so that either the St Edward’s Crown or the Queen’s Crown of Scotland could be inserted, depending upon where the phone box would be used. Interestingly, although the Bellfield Street kiosk has been cast with a slot, the St Edward’s Crown has still been used.



As part of the adoption, BT provided a replacement door and a discreet but secure lock has been fitted. The tatty plastic windows have been removed and the old paint stripped and sanded down. The new (red) paint is ready to go on, but realistically, no painting will take place until spring. The current plan is for the phone box to be re-painted and re-glazed; after this full length, opaque acrylic panels will be fixed on the inside to act as diffuser screens. Extra fluorescent tubes will then be installed within, creating a large “light box” from which to display images by local artists, schoolchildren or other groups.



Artwork: Steve Wheatley

*Example illustration of the Light-Box using artwork, photographic images or simply illumination to create a ‘glowing’ effect.*

Steve Wheatley, who is leading the project, said “When I’ve been out working on the phone box I’ve had so many people stop and chat and ask about the project. I’ve had many positive comments about it. Quite a few of the older people remember using it to phone their loved-ones. In this age of Smartphones some of the youngsters, including my son, are amazed when they realised what it was originally used for. Part of the reason I wanted the Community Council to adopt it is that it is nostalgic. It’s an integral part of the local heritage. But I also wanted to do something a bit different with it, and put it to an alternative use. The “Light Box” project is just to get things going. The point was to adopt it first and do something simple with it. Other ideas might follow.”

In the meantime, an internet fundraising campaign was launched on SpaceHive - the world's first funding platform for public space projects. The target is £1785 which will be used to fund the materials and the printing of the initial artwork to be displayed. Alternatively donations can be made by cash or cheque (payable to “Porty Light Box Project”), and sent to John Stewart, 4a Elcho Terrace, Edinburgh, EH 15 2 EF. All donations will be acknowledged.

## Planning

### 222 – 228 Portobello High Street

Several planning applications have been lodged by Sainsburys regarding the present Woodwares shop on the High Street. Sainsburys wish to open a local store in these premises. PAS has objected to these applications, not because we object to Sainsbury's opening a store here but because we considered that the plans that they submitted were not appropriate for listed buildings in a Conservation Area. Sainsburys proposed demolishing the entire frontage of number 222 – an almost complete original stone shop front dating from about 1824 – and replacing it with a large glazed door and huge windows of unequal heights. They also proposed erecting a very large branded fascia across the entire width of numbers 222-226. The frontage of number 228 would have had the window to the East converted into a door.

Sainsbury's have a '*Heritage*' style of shop-front which they have used in other conservation areas in Edinburgh, such as Howe Street in the New Town, and Bernard Street in Leith. This design of shop front uses more discrete red lettering and not the much brighter mix of plum, orange and white which is used for their ordinary signage. They have also consulted amenity groups in many conservation areas prior to submitting planning applications but no such consultation was done regarding the Portobello proposals and for some reason, Sainsburys have not proposed the 'heritage' style shop-front for Portobello either.

Over 120 responses were lodged by members of the public regarding these applications and, in the light of these, Sainsburys have revised their plans. It is now proposed that the original Georgian stone frontages of number 222 and 228 will remain as they are. A new frontage, with a branded fascia, will be erected for no. 226.

While the revised plans are a considerable improvement on the previous plans, it is still a matter of regret that Sainsbury's do not intend using their 'Heritage' signage in Portobello. The revised proposals were granted at the Council's Development Management sub-committee meeting on December 5th. Unfortunately no improvements were made to the proposed signage.

### 280 – 284 Portobello High Street (St. Andrews' Restaurant)

PAS also objected to an application to replace the entire frontage of the 'St. Andrews' restaurant, which is part of a unified block of listed buildings on the High Street. The applicant wished to create a diagonal ramped sloping access flanked by huge glazed windows set at angles. The frontage of the residential properties above would have been supported by two columns; the new open area behind the columns being closed off by a vast security shutter which, as the restaurant is open only in the evening, would have presented a large dead frontage to the street during the day. The planning department has refused this application.

### 11 Rosefield Street

An application to demolish 11 Rosefield Street, which has been empty and boarded up for a considerable time, has been granted. Two previous applications for a larger house of a different design were previously withdrawn by the applicant. PAS objected to all of the applications as we felt that original buildings within the conservation area should be retained where ever possible. Although the application which has been granted is much better, in our view, than the previous applications - the proposed design is for a two storey building of roughly the same height and design as the present structure, the main difference being the addition of a new single storey wing to the South at the side – the front of the new building will be roughcast, only the dressings will be stone. PAS felt that the whole of the frontage should be natural stone, as are the frontages of the new houses in Rosefield Avenue, opposite the end of Rosefield Street. The development management sub-committee however did not share this view and granted the application as it stood.

## **Interpretation Boards**

Repairs are becoming more frequent as the boards age, the youngest board is now eleven years old. Four boards have been repaired in the past year by the “Signs and Plaques” sub-committee of the Portobello Community Council.

### **Geology Board at Joppa Pans**

In our last Newsletter we reported that this board, vandalised in June 2011, could not be repaired and that an insurance claim would be made to cover its replacement. Further effort, largely by Alison Robinson, effected a satisfactory repair and the board now looks as good as new, at a cost of £100, which is the amount of the excess on an insurance claim.

### **Seashore Board at Seafield Bus Terminus and Horizon Board at the foot of John Street**

These have been smartened by removing the chipped white paint on the metal edges to reveal the silvery-grey aluminium. The transparent polycarbonate covers have been cleaned or replaced. The polycarbonate, which protects the underlying board from vandals, becomes discoloured by light after about five years.

### **Pottery Board at the Kilns**

The problems with water ingress between the board and polycarbonate have been much reduced by making tiny drainage holes in the polycarbonate.

## **Finger Posts**

There are ten finger posts in Portobello, five on the High Street and five on the Promenade. Members of PAS and Portobello Community Council, together with representatives of the City Council who are responsible for the finger posts, recently inspected the finger posts. A list of repairs, mostly missing “fingers” and alterations to up-date directions, was compiled. Repairs will be implemented by the City of Edinburgh Council in the next financial year.

## **East Edinburgh Environment Team Task Force**

At the monthly meetings of the Portobello Amenity Society (PAS) a member of the committee presents a report of the current activities of the City's Task Force for our area. It is charged with maintaining aspects of our local environment in good condition (beach, promenade, roadways, drainage, parks, and green spaces) and general signage for traffic management and directions to various amenities. Through our liaison we are able to raise certain matters within their remit that have been reported to us in the area. Examples of some of the points we have raised recently which have either been tackled or will be rectified as their budget allows:

- Puddle problem in the bus shelter at William's Fish Shop and on the promenade in the area between the foot of James Street and Bedford Terrace.
- Pavement repairs in James Street near entrance to Arran Court.
- Renewal or repair of finger posts pointing to various amenities in the Portobello area.
- Periodic major drainage problems flooding gutters and low-lying parts of the roadway after heavy rain.
- Gutter and pavement puddle problems in heavy rain at driveways of two houses in Duddingston Park South.

If anyone has any appropriate concerns they can contact Mr. P.E. Lake (Tel. 669 4063) who will raise them with the East Edinburgh Environment Team