

Greyfriars Bobby's Bar – no dog's dinner...



by Simon Walton / main picture Black Stallion Photography

150 years in the making, Edinburgh's oldest puppy is groomed to perfection for its restoration celebrations, topped out by a VIP lunch for invited guests, held last Tuesday. Deputy Lord Provost Deidre Brock, and former Lord Provost Norman Irons basked in the reflected glory of the showpiece gallery mirror, and also the memory of William Chambers. The Deputy Lord Provost wore the chain of office from 1867 in commemoration. Chambers, a nineteenth-century Lord Provost himself, whose statue resides in adjoining Chambers Street, saved Edinburgh's most famous stray from an unsavoury and premature end. As Bobby, the Skye Terrier was legally a stray after the death of his owner John Gray, he would have been put down without the licence Chambers bought for him. A billion tourist snaps, endless films, and the entire souvenir stock of both News and Express News on George IV Bridge would be no more.

Fair to say then, the well loved bar has been a little dog-eared of late. That's all changed, as a major restoration project has seen the building fully restored in a month long project. "This is one of the most famous buildings in Edinburgh," said manager Gillian Newman, who's taken over running the popular pub on Candlemaker Row, just off George IV Bridge. She's moved from the nearby Conan Doyle, so knows all about the importance of historical significance. "The bar frames just about every picture that's ever been taken of the Greyfriars Bobby statue, so there's been a real sense of responsibility in the work we've done."

In practical terms, working around a busy thoroughfare – frequented every few minutes by big red City Sightseeing buses – and Greyfriars Kirkyard itself, has been tricky. While scaffolding shrouded the early eighteenth-century exterior, the interior has been brought up to a new level of comfort. "The layout will be familiar, but regulars will see Bobby's looking much better," said Gillian Newman. "The big changes have been behind the scenes, where we've installed brand new

kitchens, and modernised all the amenities”.



With the works completed, what's on offer now is no dog's dinner. Bobby's has upped the ante, and is comfortable entertaining dignitaries in celebrating its historical connections with the highest office in the city. Allan Walker, an Edinburgh charity organiser, was among the guests enjoying lunch, but, like almost everyone in the city, he has a historical link with Bobby's too. "It looks wonderful and a real credit to the time and effort put into the premises," he said. "It was a trip back down memory lane for me as I was the Beat Officer for this Pub back in the 80's when the area

was a slightly different beast.”

Bobby's, an apostrophe no new signage will ever suppress, already has a good reputation for superb cask ales and quality pub food. Table service in the opened out dining area just adds to the treat. However, neighbouring Greyfriars Kirkyard is home to more than the famously devoted Skye Terrier. There's a haunting reminder of those lying, not necessarily at rest, behind the pub's walls. "There's a cold spot, just between the bar and the kitchens," said Gillian Newman. "We didn't encounter our reputed ghost during the restoration, but the building has given us a few unexpected creaks and groans. We don't know who it might be, but we always keep one chair set aside, just in case they want to try our fine ales ... or spirits".

We're not so sure about the ghost, and the cold spot may have something to do with the freezer store above. Either way, Lords Provost, past and present, and now more regular citizens are invited in. There's even somewhere outside for a modern day Bobby, if he happens to faithfully accompany would-be diners.

Greyfriars Bobby bar and restaurant 0131 225 8328
(greyfriarsbobby@nicholsonspubs.com)