

Historian fighting to stop Jawbone Arch being 'thrown in the tip'

An Edinburgh historian fighting to stop the Meadows' Jawbone Arch from being "thrown into a garbage tip" says he has been "stonewalled" by the council.

Graeme Cruickshank, who claimed he previously 'adopted' the dilapidated landmark under the 'adopt-a-monument' scheme, was ordered to leave a council meeting after pleading to be officially recognised as a stakeholder in discussions around its future.

The heated exchange at the Culture and Communities Committee on Thursday, February 29, culminated in his microphone being turned off and the meeting being briefly adjourned, before City Chambers security were called to attend.

The whale bones were removed for restoration works in 2014, but later deemed too fragile to return.

Council officials said they are now "beyond reasonable repair" and should be "disposed of".

They said there was also "little appetite" for a replica to be made and sited in the Meadows where the original arch stood for over 120 years.

However Mr Cruickshank, a local historian with a special interest in the bones for over 20 years, said there was a "very keen appetite that they should either be preserved and re-erected on site, or if that's impractical that a replica should be made and erected where they had been".

He told the LDRS: "I think if they have to be abandoned – I want to stop them from being thrown into a garbage tip. They're very much part of Edinburgh's history."

He told councillors he hoped his deputation would "win this committee's approval that I be recognised as a stakeholder in this issue".

He said: "Some people say that's not really important but it's been used in the past as a reason for my exclusion. I am told only this committee can grant stakeholder status."

Mr Cruickshank claimed he had been through "two years of being stonewalled, blocked, deceived and lied to".

Councillors proceeded to question what his vision was for the Jawbone Arch, however he told them he was only in attendance to seek their approval for stakeholder status.

Convener Cllr Val Walker said: "I know there have been issues in the past but you were invited to the August meeting and you have another opportunity today. I don't know if there will be a further opportunity. But it is up to you whether you want to say anything about what you would like to see happen to the jawbone Arch."

Asking Mr Cruickshank to withdraw, she added: "You're only here today to speak about the jawbones, not to speak about your request to be a stakeholder". As he continued to make his case to members the meeting was adjourned and security was called.

Upon leaving the Dean of Guild Court Room, he complained it had been an "affront to local democracy," telling councillors they would be "hearing from me again".

He said afterwards: "They are one of the few surviving relics of the great Edinburgh international exhibition of 1886 – Scotland's first such exhibition which was held on the Meadows. They were part of that exhibition. And when it closed the jawbones were saved and re-erected not on their original position but at least on the Meadows as a permanent reminder of that occasion.

"Thousands of people walked under them every day but haven't for the last eight or nine years because they've been in

storage.”

A report to the committee said: “Officers have researched, within reason, opportunities for relocation and found no interested parties. This is a reflection of the state of the jawbones and ongoing responsibilities required for safe display and maintenance.”

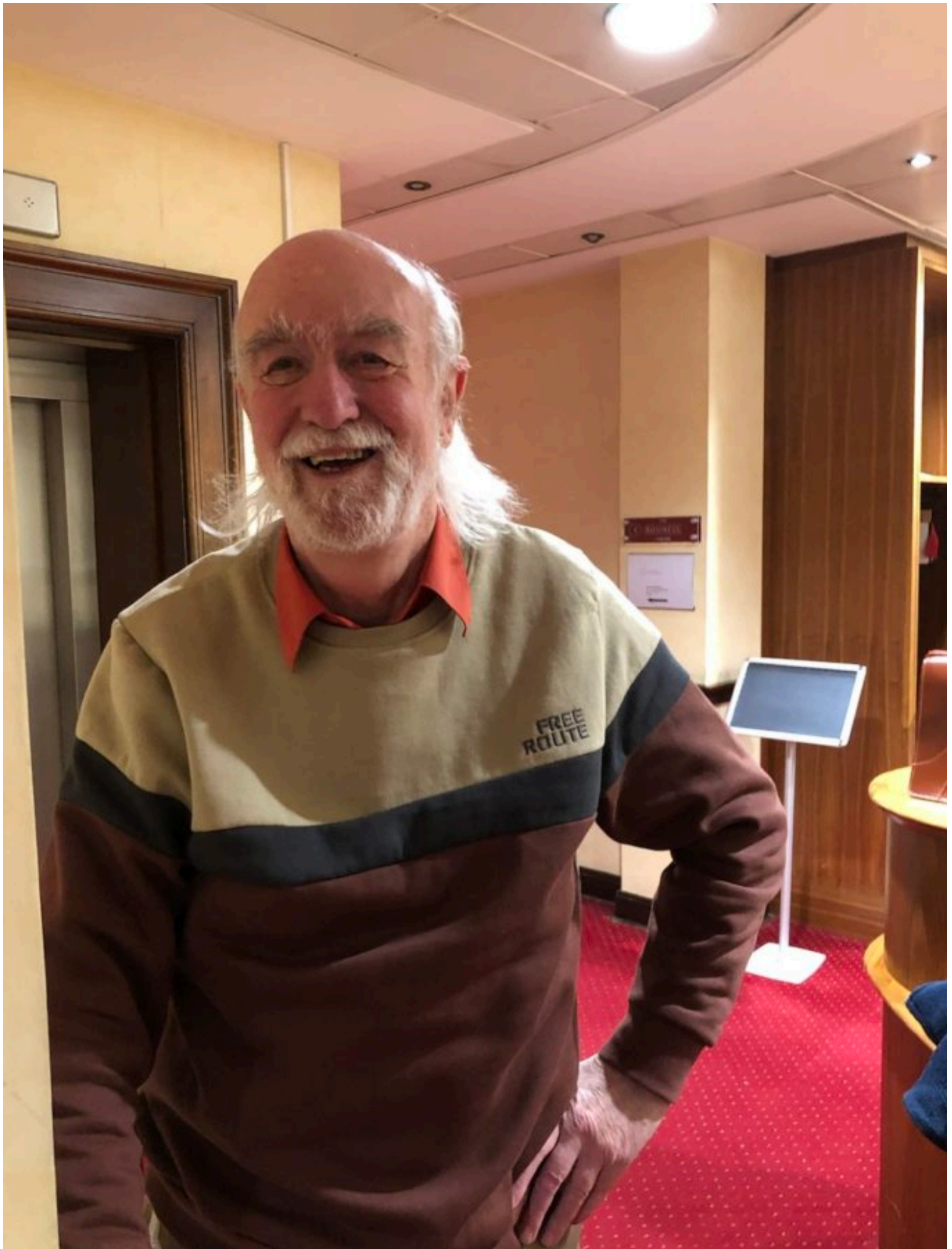
Efforts to explore alternative use by artists “also hit a buffer” because whale jawbones are classified as hunted species and the material can’t be sold if incorporated into an artwork.

However “further dialogue” is set to take place between Edinburgh World Heritage “which is opposed to the report findings and recommendation” before any final disposal decision.

The report added: “Response from the local community has been muted. There was little appetite for a replacement as recommended in the report, and officers will move to suggest the installation of a jawbone arch interpretation panel with (potentially) a surviving section.”

New Zealand-based sculptor Helen Pollock, who has family links to the bones, has offered to help pay for them to be returned to Shetland where the whale washed up in the late 1800s. She told the Shetland News they would be a “magnificent exhibit” inside or outside a museum on the island.

by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter



Graeme Cruickshank



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Jawbone Walk, The Meadows

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