

# Glasgow's Egyptian Halls owner banned from scaffolding ads

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The owners of the Egyptian Halls have been ordered to stop putting ads on scaffolding on the A-list building, which has been languishing for decades (Image: Newsquest)



By Caroline Wilson  
Senior Reporter

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The owner of one of Glasgow's most important historical buildings has been banned from putting highly lucrative but illegal advertising on scaffolding erected on the property.

Derek Souter of Union Street Properties (USP), the custodians of the Egyptian Halls has been served with an interdict by Glasgow City Council.

The A-list building, considered Alexander 'Greek' Thomson's greatest achievement, has been covered in scaffolding for fifteen years as the building languishes.

Adverts on the redevelopment of the General Post Office on George Square are thought to have netted the owners around £70,000 a month.

Council leader Susan Aitken said the four-storey building had been the "biggest barrier" to progress to improve Union Street, considered one of the most rundown in the city centre and close to Central Station, where scores of tourists arrive each day.

Despite several attempts at restoration, it remains in a parlous state with little done by its owners other than rudimentary work and no plans taken forward.



Refusing to comply with the interdict, which was served on July 24, could result in Mr Souter being found to be in contempt of court.

He was refused planning permission and despite a Scottish Government appeal being rejected has had six different advertisements on the scaffolding since June 2022.

The owner has until August 14 to lodge answers to the Court of Session if he intends to defend the action. If he does not, the council can then obtain a decree for the removal of the advertising.

It is hoped the interdict will be a first step in securing a future for the building, which was completed in 1872 as new commercial premises for James Robertson, an iron manufacturer.

Susan Aitken, leader of Glasgow City Council, said it was committed to its future and keen to work with anyone with "a creative business plan."

In May 2021, the Scottish Civic Trust established The Egyptian Halls SCIO, which aims to acquire ownership of the building and undertake a full restoration programme. Its trustees include Paul Sweeney MSP, John Nicolson MP, and Murray Grigor.

"The Egyptian Halls has been the biggest barrier for us being able to do anything with Union Street," said Cllr Aitken.



"It takes up so much of the space, it's a blight on the street and it has been allowed to get into that condition.

"We are finally getting a bit of movement.

"There are communities of interest who care very much about the Egyptian halls and there are some very creative ideas about what could be done with that building to revitalise it and to raise the necessary resource to restore it because it's in an appalling condition.

"It's not going to be overnight, it will take time and significant investment but I think there are a lot of folk who are interested in a future."

In response Mr Souter said: "Legal issues; some known and some non-disclosed caused four approved schemes to founder and costs and deterioration to increase

"USP and its professional team are aiming to meet with GCC circa mid-August, and all relevant issues will be on the agenda.

"USP has also been working on what is believed to be the scheme that will leverage the regeneration potential of the Egyptian Halls and the wider environs of Union Street and will also discuss this with GCC and HES."

Built using cast iron and stone, the Egyptian Halls was one of the last major projects of Alexander Thomson.

The building broke many of the rules of the time; thick stone columns normally found at ground level were on the top floor.

Writing to his brother George after its completion, Thomson commented:

"He [the client] is very proud of the building - a writer in The Architect says of it - this is probably the Architect's most successful effort, and we doubt if its equal, for originality, grandeur of treatment or imposing effect, could be found in any City, not excepting the Metropolis itself."



In common with many other buildings of its era, it fell into disrepair in the second half of the 20th century.

In 1996 Glasgow City Council announced a compulsory purchase order (CPO) on the building.

Four years later Dundee businessman Derek Souter and his company Union Street Developments (USD) acquired a stake in the property and announced plans to restore it but funding problems led to further delays.

In 2003 Glasgow City Council bought the building just before its CPO was due to expire in the hope that USD would find the funding to complete the restoration.

The company bought the entire building in the summer of 2008, but other than work to prevent further decay little had been done.

In 2010 the council put £1million aside for structural repairs which the owners were told to match, but the funds did not materialise.

The Egyptian Halls was added to the shortlist of the fourteen most significant endangered buildings in Europe by Europa Nostra in 2019.

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