

Glasgow's remarkable Egyptian Halls

From the archive

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EGYPTIAN Halls in Union Street, Glasgow, built in 1870-72 as a sort of shopping centre and gallery, is a late work by Alexander Greek Thomson and one of the most remarkable commercial buildings of its time in Britain. Its deteriorating condition, exacerbated by multiple ownership, has long been of concern to those who care about the architecture of Glasgow. In recent years, positive steps have been taken to resolve this intolerable state of affairs. Following the serving of a compulsory purchase order by Glasgow City Council in 1996, further damaging delay was threatened by changes of ownership and the threat of litigation, but in the event this was avoided by Mr Derek Soutar of Union Street Developments acquiring majority ownership. An admirable structural and conservation report was commissioned and, with the support of Historic Scotland, the long overdue restoration and refurbishment of this largely derelict city-centre listed building seemed imminent. Now the future of Egyptian Halls is again in jeopardy as Scottish Enterprise Glasgow has informed the owner that it cannot now provide #245,000 grant assistance to the project as "it is not a priority in terms of the Operating Plan 2000-01" and "does not fit with any of the priorities for Scottish Enterprise National". Yet, only three years ago in its former guise of the Glasgow Development Agency, this publicly-funded body felt able to assist a more destructive scheme for Egyptian Halls which did not respect the integrity of Thomson's iron-framed interior. Particularly as one of Scottish Enterprise Glasgow's ostensible aims is "the development, redevelopment and improvement of the environment", it would be interesting to learn why the improvement of Union Street through the regeneration of a largely unused commercial masterpiece by an internationally celebrated Scottish architect who is now recognised as being one of Glasgow's great heritage assets is not regarded as being of economic benefit to this city.

Gavin Stamp, Chairman, Alexander Thomson Society, 1 Moray Place, Glasgow. August 23.

August 22.