



2020

MEDIA COVERAGE



NEWS

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Call for Glasgow's Egyptian Halls to become museum of slavery

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Journalist



Much of the Egyptian Halls has been empty for 40 years

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GLASGOW'S at-risk Egyptian Halls should become Scotland's museum of slavery, according to a public vote.

The five-storey building, which dates from the 1870s, is one of the last remaining structures by celebrated architect Alexander "Greek" Thomson.

The privately owned Union Street site, which has spent years under advertising hoardings, has housed retail units, offices, studios and restaurants. But much of it has been empty for 40 years and the building has suffered serious damage and decay.



Now it has been earmarked as a site for a possible museum of slavery following an architecture competition and public vote.

The process predates current calls for a radical rethink of our public statues, museum collections and street names as the global Black Lives Matter movement forces a new focus on both contemporary and historical

wrongs, including the slave trade. But the announcement, which had been set for April, was delayed due to the pandemic. Now the organisers of the contest, the Alexander Thomson Society, say public interest in the matter means they cannot wait any longer.

The proposal was made by Gavin Fraser of Polmont, who said the halls "represent a culture and a period in history synonymous with slavery and its profits". He added: "When we walk around Glasgow, not so far from Union Street, we can see many remnants of Glasgow's grisly slave-related history: the Merchant City, Virginia Street and Jamaica Street to name but a few.

"But beyond this contextual reference to slavery, we see the remnants of its lucrative life within Glasgow's fine buildings from the 19th century ... with nothing to commemorate or recognise this history."

Councillor Graham Campbell previously suggested Glasgow's Museum of Modern Art (GOMA) – once the home of a tobacco and sugar merchant – as a site for such a centre.

However, the Alexander Thomson Society said: "While the building doesn't have the historic relevance that GOMA does to Glasgow's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, it is still located in the heart of the city, close to the river, and to Jamaica St – so named for the connection between Scotland and Jamaica, the place where the majority of Scottish slaves were based. And the building has been put to a similar use before.

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"The building started off life as the home of the Egyptian Halls Fancy Bazaar Company, which was an emporium styled on the Egyptian Halls in London, and included exhibition space, lecture and performance spaces, a restaurant and market.

"This A-listed building has now been vacant for 40 years and was recently listed as one of the 14

most endangered cultural sites in Europe."

Zandra Yeaman, of the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights (CRER), said: "It's particularly heartening to know that the hundreds of people who took part in the public vote also support this initiative.

"CRER has been campaigning for this for over a decade now, and even the Scottish Parliament have now shown their support. Community involvement and participation will be crucial to ensure the context and content of the museum credibly reflects the lives, origins and experiences of Black minority ethnic people in Scotland, and the task ahead is huge.

"We've asked the Scottish Government to fund a comprehensive scoping study to begin to make this a reality, and the use of the Egyptian Halls as a potential venue should definitely be explored further."

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Creative solutions proposed for iconic Glasgow structure

March, 2020

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OVER 50 people gathered in Glasgow recently at an event aimed at helping to save a famous city centre A-listed building.



The Save Egyptian Halls event, hosted by The Alexander Thomson Society, brought together professionals and the general public to discuss what such buildings mean to Glasgow and how the 19th century Egyptian Halls on Union Street could be saved from demolition.

The four-storey building was designed by Alexander 'Greek' Thomson. The renowned Scottish architect is behind the design of other structures such as the St. Vincent Street Church and Holmwood House. However, in a letter to his brother he stated that the Egyptian Halls was his finest piece of work.

The Society's vice-chair, Scott Abercrombie, opened the event by giving an update on the current status of the building. Shrouded by scaffolding since 2009, the Egyptian Halls has been deteriorating over the years and is under genuine threat of demolition should a plan not be created for it. Europa Nostra, a pan-European federation for cultural heritage, recently named the structure as one of Europe's seven most endangered buildings.

Much of the first half of the event was made up of the history of not just Thomson's work in Glasgow, but the city's architecture as a whole. Niall Murphy of Glasgow City Heritage Trust spoke about commercial architecture, while Fiona Sinclair of Fiona Sinclair Architects and Mark Baines of the Alexander Thomson society gave their insights into Thomson's work across the city.

Then came the technical element. Ben Adam, managing director of David Narro Associates, spoke on the conservation approach to structural engineering, incorporating issues such as rainwater. He detailed the use of cast iron and stone in the build of the Egyptian Halls and the use of thick columns on the top floor which would normally, at that time, have been found on the ground level of such structures.

Dara Parsons, deputy head of casework at Historic Environment Scotland, spoke of the development and protection of Scotland's built environment. He told Project Scotland, "There are some complex issues around Egyptian Halls. Solving those issues will need some creative solutions. It needs creative approaches to design and engineering, but also creative approaches to funding. It also needs a commitment from all involved to continue to discuss and test a wide range of options."

Andrew McConnell told of the work of the Glasgow Building Preservation Trust in protecting the city's structures, before Jamie McNamara, of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, concluded the presentations with a talk on the rescue and reuse of historic buildings.

In line with the event came the announcement of the winner of The Alexander Thomson Society's 'Re-imaging Egyptian Halls' competition, which sought to attract ideas for potential uses for the building through architectural drawings. In total, 21 entries from around the world were received. Igor Shkut and Vasilii Portnyagin from Russia won the first prize of £500 for their concept of the building being transformed into a temple of thought - featuring a library and galleries.



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News

30th January

Heritage bodies' bid to save Glasgow's historic Egyptian Halls

By Drew Sandelands | @drewsandelands
Local Democracy Reporter



VIEW OF EGYPTIAN HALLS IN UNION STREET, GLASGOW. PIC: NICK POTTY.

0 comment

HERITAGE organisations will gather in Glasgow to 'kickstart productive discussions' on the future of Alexander 'Greek' Thomson's Egyptian Halls.

Owners of the Union Street masterpiece have said it is under "real threat of structural collapse" and Europa Nostra, a pan-European heritage body, shortlisted it as one of Europe's 14 most at-risk cultural sites.

The Alexander Thomson Society, which aims to promote and safeguard the architect's work, is fighting to save the Egyptians Halls.



What Will You Discover?

READ MORE: Alexander 'Greek' Thomson's Egyptians Halls is under "real threat" of collapse, owners say

It launched a petition in December which has been signed by over 4000 people. Now, it has arranged a meeting with representatives from Historic Environment Scotland, Glasgow Building Preservation Trust and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings on Friday, February 21.

Key stakeholders, such as Glasgow City Council and the building's owners, Union Street Properties Ltd and Union Street Investments Ltd, are also invited to attend and contribute to discussions.

A society spokesman said: "The event is intended to emphasise that Egyptian Halls is a building that must be saved, to examine the opportunities that could support this action, and to explore successful case studies of other historic buildings which have been saved.

"It is hoped that by bringing everyone together under one roof that productive discussions might be kickstarted that spur some positive change on the site."

Earlier this month, Union Street Properties posted a video on YouTube which states the building could collapse due to a number of "trigger events", including the failure of floors slabs, columns and beams.

However, a city council spokesman said a survey, carried out by the authority around 18 months ago, found "no danger of imminent collapse".

READ MORE: Egyptian Halls named one of Europe's most endangered buildings

The building is currently in the running for Europa Nostra's seven most endangered programme, which identifies at-risk monuments and sites in Europe and mobilises public and private partners on a local, national and European level to find a viable future for the sites.



Tickets for the event, taking place at The Lighthouse, will be available to the public, for £10, from Friday. They can be purchased from the society's website.

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