



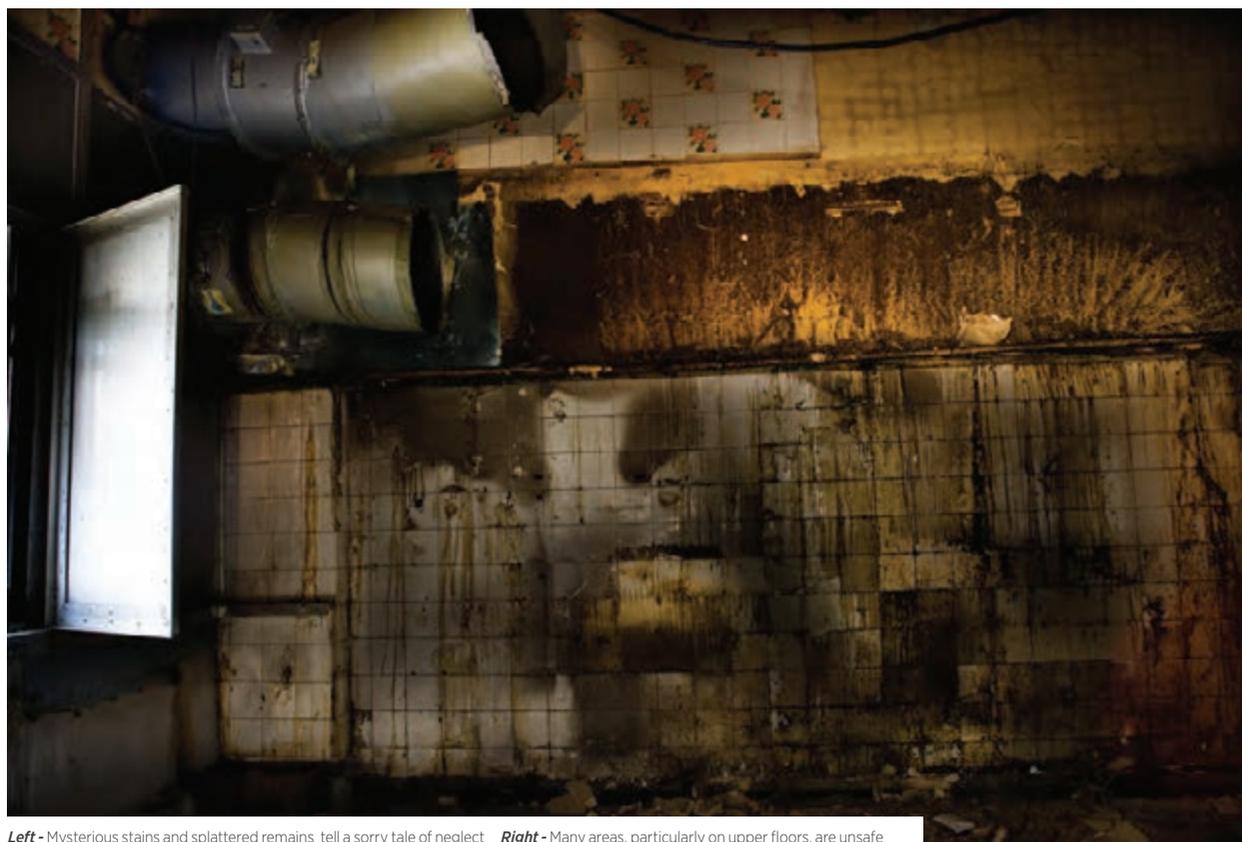
# PRE 2009 MEDIA COVERAGE



# DERELICTION OF DUTY

GLASGOW'S EGYPTIAN HALLS HAVE LAIN QUIETLY MOULDERING FOR DECADES. BUT WHAT LIES BENEATH THE RESPECTABLE FACADE? WHAT TALES ECHO THROUGH ITS CRUMBLING HALLS? CAN A DRAWN OUT DECLINE BE ARRESTED? URBAN REALM INVESTIGATES...





**Left** - Mysterious stains and splattered remains tell a sorry tale of neglect **Right** - Many areas, particularly on upper floors, are unsafe

Entering Egyptian Halls is an experience akin to entering one of the tombs from which Alexander "Greek" Thomson took inspiration for this his finest surviving commercial work.

Past steel security shutters the hustle and light of Union Street swiftly gives way to a fraught torchlight crawl up a stairwell which grants access to the first floor, an open plan space formerly occupied by a Chinese restaurant. The occasional spot of incongruous Mandarin and a nightmarish kitchen now enveloped entirely by darkness save for two feature atria drawing guano dappled light to the interior.

These measures are in place not to deter grave robbers but rather to dissuade Glasgow's transient population from bedding down on its musty floors. The detritus from pre secured entry days still litters the floors of the building in the form of page three girls, Irn Bru cans and the odd takeaway wrapper providing clue to the Halls' last unwelcome tenants. Such artefacts are promised to be removed in a clear up of the premises by owners Union Street Developments Ltd.

It is a sad fall for one of the city's few remaining Thomson landmarks, a fall that has been less precipitous than surreptitious. From the street the Halls' solid masonry appears eternal, but this masks ongoing degradation of the interior structure, a deterioration that threatens the structural stability of the building.

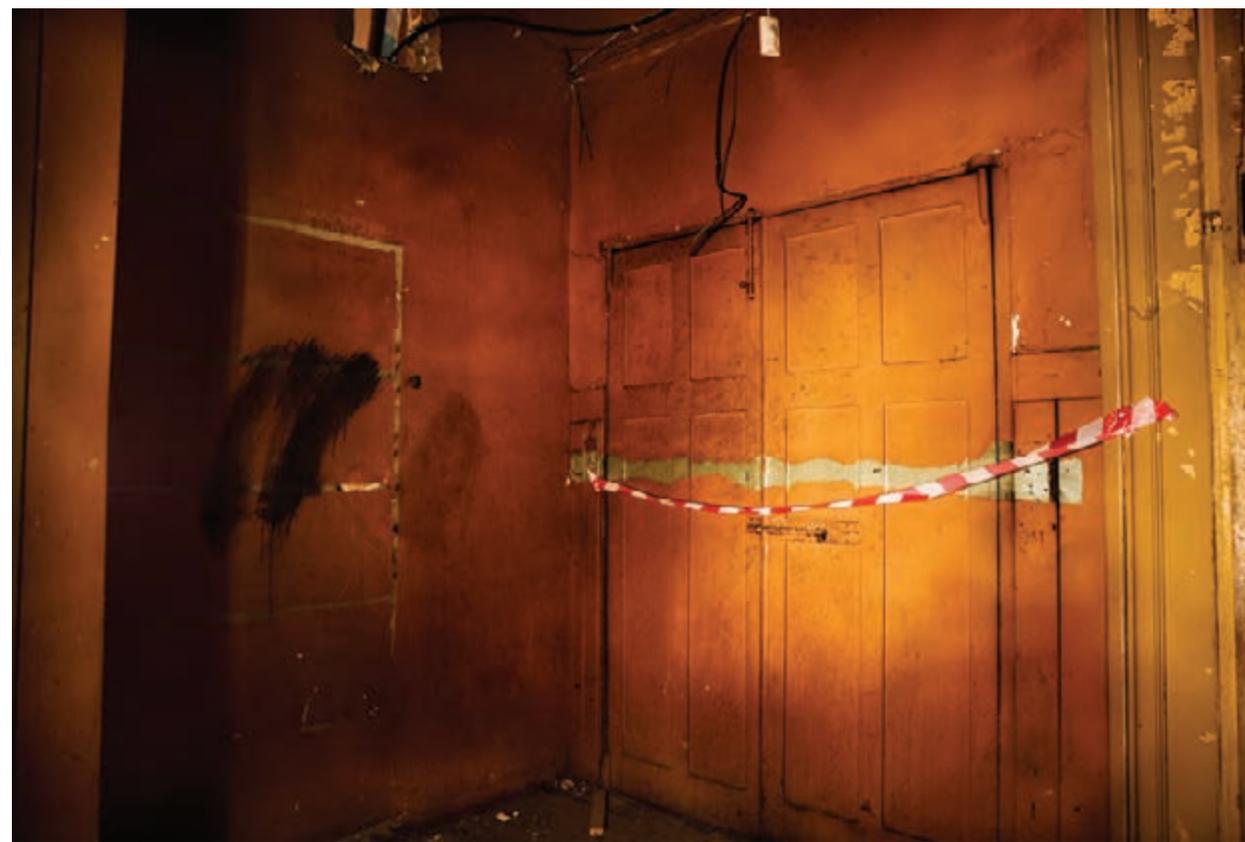
Described as Thomson's finest surviving commercial building, the structure, when built in 1872, was originally less a warehouse and more a bazaar or early shopping mall replete with an exhibition gallery. Six cast iron lamp standards once stood proudly at the entrance but have since been removed.

Bearing witness to this sad tale of decline over the past decade is fast talking Dundonian developer Derek Souter of USD Ltd. A larger than life figure who has been campaigning to convert the ailing landmark into a hotel or office space for over 11 years. He declared: "If this final opportunity is not realised and if the floors can't be repaired, then the stairs go and the façade will need to be propped and perhaps eventually demolished due to combined cost and structural issues. This is a doomsday scenario for Union Street which is in dire need of regeneration NOW."

Costs of refurbishment have soared on the A listed warehouse after a 20 year period of prevarication, in which time the building fabric has continued to deteriorate. Said Souter: "We've spent the last three years with GCC/Historic Scotland stating what would happen and it is now becoming reality at an accelerating pace. Our plans, which would preserve the building's unique iron framework and add a three storey extension, were first raised in late 2006. Now, after another £350k of investment by USD, it's now conceded by GCC that "there's structural issues" with the floors, which literally skyrockets the costs and which we'd also identified late 2006."

Such a collapse has stoked fears that, were it to happen, council taxpayers would be landed with a massive bill to prop the façade up. This process could close off a section of street and impede traffic on what is a major city congestion point and cause business to further hemorrhage on Union Street.

However, with long running problems over ownership resolved after Glasgow City Council (GCC) served compulsory purchase orders on upper floor owners in 1995, Souter and



his fellow investors (Duncan Souter and Kelvin Kerr) now enjoy 100% control and the flexibility to seek a partnership of the public and private sectors to revitalise the architectural landmark.

To achieve this it will be necessary for Historic Scotland, GCC and Scottish Enterprise to agree on a significant funding package, with the remainder of the £12m costs sourced privately, probably through a BPRA funding vehicle, with Souter stating there could be "100% payback of grant funding within a decade" and that no money would be accepted until

**» If this final opportunity is not realised and if the floors can't be repaired, then the stairs go and the facade will need to be propped and perhaps eventually demolished. «**

an end user was identified. Souter also reinforced USP/USI investment to date is £5M.

Revised plans for the Halls designed by the Morrison Partnership/Addison Conservation have been with GCC/HS for 8/9 months and should receive listed building consent for the upper floors to become offices or (more likely) a 110-120 bedroom hotel with Retail/Restaurant/ Bars on the ground floor and a business centre or gym in the basement area. The location lends itself to this form of mixed use and would see an ailing and traffic choked Union Street benefit from long overdue investment.

Critical to this redevelopment is provision of a three tiered set back glass extension to crown the Halls. Gaining access

to the roof a panorama of surrounding developments can be observed, highlighting the relatively low rise nature of the Halls in Glasgow's roofscape. From this lofty vantage Souter points out recent developments such as gm+ad's Vienna Apartments and Page & Park's Lighthouse extensions as appropriate precedents for the Egyptian Halls to truly stand tall once again.

Inevitably some commentators have balked at the desecration of an A listed structure which, as a building type, have become increasingly common throughout the city centre although a harsh planning regime generally stifles any flair

in their execution, evidenced by an unobtrusive glass box at Holmes's 110 St Vincent Street, or attempting to ape the historic shoulders upon which the extension sits ala Keppie's 145 St

Vincent Street. The extension here drops any classical allusions in favour of a straightforward glazed setback which developer and architect insist will not intrude upon the primary elevation when viewed from the street.

Derek Souter agrees however that obsession over the elevations detracts from the real issue of saving the building: "As a director of the company that could save this building there's a darn sight more than just the "elevations" i.e. the unique cast iron frame. If we'd been allowed to proceed with our previous scheme in 2000 we'd not have needed the extra floors as we do now, due to massive cost increases. Then again this is a real project, which needs a sustainable, deliverable commercial future. No Lighthouse here I'm afraid to say!"



**Above** - The Halls as they could be, a rooftop extension hidden from view

**Below** - The Halls as they once were back in their Victorian heyday



Interestingly that symbol of public sector profligacy could be thrown a lifeline in phase two of these works which would see creation of the Mackintosh - Thomson Mews, a commercial arcade running through Mitchell Lane and creating a new route from Buchanan Street to Central Station. USP regard this move as a means to increasing the commercial sustainability of the Lighthouse by enhancing east west permeability through the city centre, though it may come too late to save the architecture centre itself.

Commenting on the prior funding application a spokesperson for Historic Scotland stated: "There is no current application before us for grants. We previously offered a grant to the owner but that fell through because the owner pulled the project, considering it no longer commercially viable".

But Souter clarifies: "The project was not pulled but the present scheme was now unviable both structurally and commercially, hence a new scheme was required," opining: "Over 11 years it's been nigh impossible to generate a cohesive public body approach and talk of fast tracking, which we sought way back in 2001 is at last potentially there but is still embryonic and needs collective agreement and activity. However an application for Historic Scotland and Scottish Enterprise via their Property Assistance Fund is currently being prepared. If we can get all three bodies co-operating effectively there's a fighting chance for the Egyptian Halls. I've written to around 25 key people at GCC/HS/SE and the Scottish Executive to try to achieve this".

If the fraught 21 year history of Egyptian Halls regeneration efforts is anything to go by the omens for a speedy resolution do not appear good. So why is Souter optimistic that things will work out this time? He states although one can always be derailed the impending Commonwealth Games does provide a bigger incentive commercially than the City of Culture way back in 1999. This optimism assumes grant funding and planning permission will be granted by December allowing work to commence on site by March 2010. Time will tell if this transpires but, as Souter says, we owe it to Alexander "Greek" Thomson to achieve this. Perhaps the city also owes it to itself to ensure the lasting legacy of one of its most famous architectural sons.



#### 1985-1991

GCC/HS become increasingly concerned with Upper Floors.

#### Jan 1991

GCC serves a Listed Building Repairs Notice on the Upper Floors.

#### Mid 98

Purchase No 88 and No 96 Union Street.

#### Early 99

Purchase No 84 Union Street and enter CPO missives with GCC to develop the Upper Floors. Existing scheme, which has £1.4m of grant comes under scrutiny.

#### 1999-2001

Superior, replacement scheme, which preserves the entire building is awarded £350k of grant funding. Agreement with existing owners of Upper Floors falls apart.

#### 2004

USP buys the final Ground floor unit at No 100

#### 2007

USP buys 50% of the Upper Floors from Man Fung Lung.

#### 2001-2007

Remaining 50% Upper Floors owners -Paratus, lodge CPO Compensation claim for £1m and finally get awarded £25k at Lands Tribunal.

#### 2007-2008

Paratus lodge an appeal to the Court of Session, projected three year process. USP reaches agreement with Paratus and then has 100% ownership.

#### 2001-2009

USP/GCC/HS become increasingly aware of the accelerating deterioration of the Egyptian Halls, the accelerating costs to repair/refurbish combined with the massive fall in Commercial Property values.

#### 2009

USP transfers ownership of Upper Floors to USI, to allow funding flexibility.

#### 2009

Hotel or Offices accepted in principle for the Upper Floors, proposals for grant support with GCC/SE/HS. Private sector brought in if this grant support is forthcoming. All stakeholders realise the economic environment they are working within.

#### 2009-2012

1. Grant Funding/ Planning permission: Oct-Dec 2009
2. Confirmed end user: Oct 2009-Mar 2010
3. Tender Process: Mar 2010-Oct 2010
4. On site: Oct 2010
5. Completion: Jun 2012

## **Egyptian Halls gain lease of life as owner dispute settled**

GERRY BRAIDEN 12 May 2008

**One of Scotland's most historically significant buildings will be given a new lease of life after two decades of ownership disputes were resolved.**

One of Scotland's most historically significant buildings will be given a new lease of life after two decades of ownership disputes were resolved.

The semi-derelict Egyptian Halls, designed by Alexander "Greek" Thomson in the mid-1800s and dominating Glasgow's Union Street, will undergo a £5m clean-up and refurbishment before being marketed as a retail or office development.

One suggestion is it could return to its original use as a commercial outlet and be turned into an upmarket shopping centre, along the lines of the Princes Square mall on nearby Buchanan Street.

Various attempts to bring the halls, regarded as Thomson's commercial masterpiece and architecture of world-class significance, back into use have been hampered by what the owners describe as "18 years of intense, fractious and complicated wrangling".

Even plans to restore the building when Glasgow was City of Architecture and Design in 1999 failed because of ownership disputes. It currently lies vacant and covered in grime above shops.

A report from 2003 found the A-listed structure required a new roof and guttering; its cupola reinstated and extensive masonry repairs, while dry rot needed treatment and the windows and doors overhauled before the plasterwork could be reinstated.

The building's long-overdue return will begin when the project goes to tender in November, with developers moving on-site next May or June. The provisional completion date is December 2010 but this will depend largely on the outcome of discussions with Glasgow City Council and Historic Scotland as well as the planning process.

The deal to conclude ownership was sealed last week, with Dundee-based Union Street Properties buying the remaining 50% of the upper floors. Director Derek Souter said: "We have invested approaching £4m over the last decade to achieve 100% ownership despite numerous and complex obstacles.

"This will begin the process of re-energising Union Street, which is still one of Glasgow's busiest thoroughfares, whilst acting as a catalyst for more investment in the area - an objective which many stakeholders, including the council, have recently stated they would like to see achieved."

He added the final investment figure, thought to be around £5m, and the eventual purpose of the halls would be determined by trading conditions when it is marketed.

A Glasgow City Council spokeswoman said: "We look forward to working with the new owners to bring forward the scheme of repairs which will return this very important building to its original condition."

## NEWSBRIEF

## Taste of China at city travel show

VISITORS to a popular travel show will be able to book themselves a golden holiday when it arrives at Glasgow's SECC.

China National Tourist Office, exhibiting for the first time at the Holiday and Travel Show, expects a surge of interest ahead of the Beijing Olympics in 2008.

The stand, at the SECC from January 20-22, will also feature Wendy Wu Tours, which highlights destinations such as Shanghai and Tibet

## Solo London show for Glasgow artist

AN award-winning Glasgow artist is celebrating the launch of her solo exhibition in London.

Sue Biazotti, from the west end, won last year's Aspect Prize which is one of Scotland's biggest painting accolades.

The 42-year-old scooped £10,000 and a chance to hold a major exhibition of her work in London's Adam Gallery.

The prize winner's show will run from today until January 17.

# New deal will seal £3.8m revamp of Egyptian Halls

■ Deadlock broken to help restore 'Greek' Thomson's architectural gem

By GERRY BRAIDEN

THE future of one of Glasgow's architectural gems looks likely to be resolved by the end of the month.

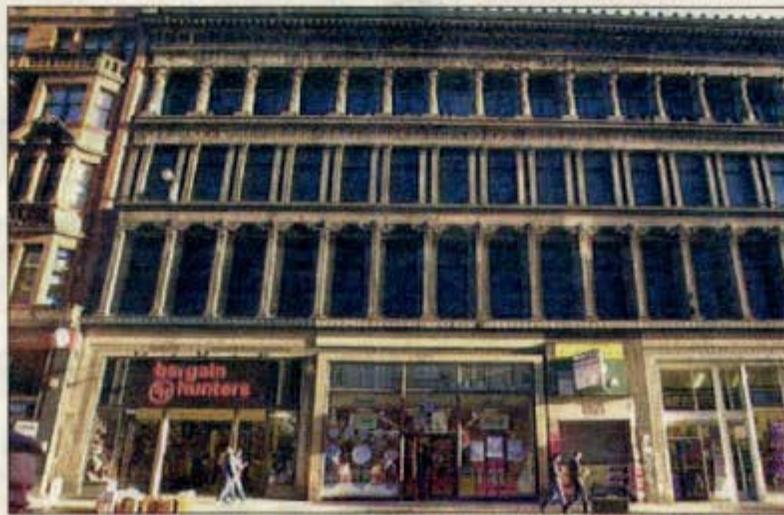
And the revamp of the A-listed Egyptian Halls - which will be in excess of £3.8million - could at last breathe much-needed life into Union Street.

There have been complaints the area has become rundown. It is now lined with empty units and To Let signs.

It is understood a deal will be struck this month that will see the halls - opposite Central Station - come under sole ownership for the first time in 70 years.

Dundee-based Union Street Developments is finalising proposals to transform the neglected Alexander 'Greek' Thomson masterpiece and have overcome the funding hurdle that has held the project up for years.

The company has also snapped up the remaining 47% of the property owned by the council for the last three years.



■ Alex Mosson said a deal for the Egyptian Halls would help bring back life to Union Street

Once a deal is reached, the building will then be marketed.

A new planning application to repair the building, including replacing windows and floors, putting in fire escapes and removing decades of grime from the stonework, has been submitted ahead of the company finalising its proposals.

Three years ago the council stepped in to snap up half the property to prevent the redevelopment collapsing when USD failed to come up with the required funding.

The four-storey, 27,000sq ft hall was completed in 1873. Besides providing a fine shopping area in the city cen-

tre, it was also used for concerts and art exhibitions.

In 2002, Mitchell's Amusement's was granted permission to take over a section of the building as an arcade. The firm spent £100,000 restoring some of the original internal features, including pillars and cornicing.

In 1999 a more ambitious

project for the property fell through. A £3m refurbishment was proposed as part of Glasgow's celebrations for its year as UK City of Architecture, but the scheme collapsed because of a legal wrangle.

Today, Terence Leventhal, of the Scottish Civic Trust, which includes the Egyptian Halls on its 'at risk' register, said the imminent deal was "great news".

He said: "All too often buildings like this languish because of issues over ownership."

"Anything that brings restoration a step closer has to be welcomed."

Alex Mosson, local councillor and the city's tourism boss, said he was hopeful the deadlock would soon be broken to the benefit of the entire city centre.

He said: "It is such an important building and a revamp would certainly help bring life back to Union Street and benefit the whole city centre."

Union Street Developments refused to comment.

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# If we truly love our architectural heritage, we will have to fight for it

From the archive

29 May 2004

Another part of Scotland's architectural heritage began to bite the dust yesterday when work started on demolishing Alexander "Greek" Thomson's offices in Glasgow city centre. It was not just neglect or the ravages of time and weather that did for the building, which had been granted "A" listed status in 1990 because of the work the Glasgow-born architect had done to grace it with his Classical design signature. The listing, denoting a building of national or international importance, counted for nothing when Glasgow city council decided that, structurally, it was a risk to public safety and had to come down. The building is one of some 1500 on the at-risk register maintained by the Scottish Civic Trust on behalf of Historic Scotland. Other factors contribute to threatened buildings appearing on the register, including inadequate planning regulations, an unwillingness, or lack of imagination, on the part of property developers to meet their obligations to the historic properties they have acquired and a lack of central funds to help meet the cost of repairs that can be onerous. As a result of all of these factors, buildings that should be cherished because they are part and parcel of our heritage are disappearing at a worrying rate. In Glasgow alone, which has some 70 buildings on the list, the trust is concerned that, at the present rate of loss for Thomson properties, the city could be bereft of them within 20 to 25 years. Yet Thomson was one of the two architects of international repute produced by Glasgow (the other was, of course, Charles Rennie Mackintosh). Imagine the outcry if a Mackintosh building were allowed to fall into a ruinous state and demolition was the only feasible option. Yet Thomson was just as important as Mackintosh. He was the master of Victorian architecture whose designs largely earned Glasgow its reputation as the quintessentially Victorian city, a reputation on which it still trades productively today. If only it had been so careful about the work of its native son, still struggling to escape from the shadow of Mackintosh. The Free Church of Scotland church on St Vincent Street, considered Thomson's finest surviving work but letting in water and suffering from crumbling stonework, has been placed on the 100 most-threatened buildings by the World Monuments Fund. Will it be next to go? All that can be said is that, unless the regulations are tightened up and developers are made to fulfil their duties, Scotland's built heritage will continue to vanish, and we will all be the poorer for that. As matters stand, local authorities have powers to protect historic buildings at risk from structural or other problems, or which are threatened with demolition. The most important is to apply a repairs notice. This requires the owner to undertake repairs to a listed property within a certain timescale. Failure to comply can result in the council, or strictly the planning authority, carrying out the repairs and charging the owner. As a last resort, the authority can seek a compulsory purchase order to make sure the work is done. Faced with the prospect of taking ownership of a building requiring perhaps millions of pounds of expenditure, however, councils are loath to take on that burden. Glasgow is apparently one of the most reluctant authorities to instigate repairs notices. However, it would be unfair to lay all of the blame on it, or any other council, grappling with the problem of a historic building in a deteriorating condition. In Glasgow's case, particularly, it is strapped for cash and has levels of deprivation to address far higher than any other local authority. Which should be the priority, protecting a listed building or supporting health and education initiatives to open the door on opportunity? If all of the owners of historic properties met their responsibilities the question probably would not need to be posed. There is a duty on the owner of a structure of architectural interest to maintain that property, but the authorities, whether at a council or heritage level, face a huge problem persuading them to live up to their obligations. Someone who inherits a historic property but lacks the funds to repair it is in a very difficult situation. The major source of assistance is funding from the historic buildings repair grant scheme. However, the scheme is vastly overburdened and, to indicate the pressure on funds, these are allocated two or three years in advance. It can suit developers to sit on their investment in hopes of turning a profit when the property market picks up. That might be in their interest, but it is not in the interests of the buildings in their care. Self-interest also applies in the case of developers who want the prime land the building sits on, rather than the structure itself. In such cases, it suits developers if the building becomes so unstable as to require demolition. Then they can put up the structure they want, and hang the consequences for the historic streetscape, now gone forever. The law does not seem to be a deterrent, as the case of Alistair Dickson demonstrated last year. He was fined (£) 1000 for illegally demolishing 200-year-old Lanrick Castle on his Stirlingshire

estate. How long before hard-nosed developers factor in such sums when costing a potential development constrained by the inconvenience of a listed building? The latest demolition in Glasgow should act as a wake-up call to all with an interest in protecting Scotland's vulnerable built heritage. Our historic, listed buildings cannot exist in aspic. They have to be put to new uses if they are to live on, but their integrity must also be maintained. Perhaps the time has come for the introduction of statutory powers for local authorities to make that happen, before it is too late.

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## Glasgow's remarkable Egyptian Halls

From the archive

Friday 25 August 2000

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.

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.



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Scottish architect's masterpiece is saved in same week that another of his Glasgow buildings has to be demolished

# Greek Thomson lost and won

## Charlie Gates

A crumbling Glasgow masterpiece by legendary Scottish architect Alexander "Greek" Thomson was saved from dereliction last week as just round the corner an A-listed building by the same architect collapsed.

The good news for Thomson admirers is that talks between Glasgow City Council, Historic Scotland and Union Street Developments held last week have led to the council's compulsory purchase of Thomson's famed Egyptian Halls in the city centre until the developer finds the cash to cover the purchase.

The bad news is that another A-listed Thomson building on Watson Street had to be demolished by the council after a floor



The Egyptian Halls (left) were saved in the same week as the warehouse on Watson Street had to be demolished.



and the rear wall of the historic warehouse collapsed last Sunday.

Jim McDonald, principal of the heritage and design team at Glasgow City Council, said the

two developments in the same week were a "funny coincidence", commenting: "It is unfortunate that we should make a breakthrough in one project,

but then lose another property."

The deal to buy Egyptian Halls came after years of deterioration while the project's partners argued over how much of a

£930,000 grant from Historic Scotland should be spent on cleaning the stones.

"In order to avoid a huge delay on Egyptian Halls we, quite unusually, sought approval to invest in the property and have it for a period of time in order to break the uncertainty and allow USD to put the finances in place," said McDonald of a move that would lead to the council maintaining the building should the development fall through.

Gavin Stamp, chairman of the Alexander Thomson Society, praised the council's bid to save what he described as "one of Thomson's greatest buildings and one of the best commercial buildings anywhere," but lamented the loss of Thomson's warehouse.

The Watson Street warehouse, built in 1876, fell vacant in the 80s and slipped into dereliction during the 90s. In 1997 the council carried out £100,000 of scaffolding work to secure the facade from collapse, but little other maintenance work was carried out.

Developer Alba Town Limited had a mixed-use regeneration scheme in place for the building, but McDonald said the deal floundered because "there is a point when the value of the land falls to a level where it is not economically viable".

The warehouse was actually built after Thomson's death in 1875 and was completed by his partner Robert Turnbull, but is still considered a posthumous Thomson classic.

## Marks Barfield café

Marks Barfield Architects has won a competition to build an "Arts Café" in Birmingham, beating Ash Sakula. The café will sit between Future Systems' Selfridges and Benoy's new Bullring shopping centre. Client the Birmingham Alliance says the scheme is based on a mathematical spiral pattern.

## Embassy shortlist

Six practices were shortlisted for the new British embassy in



This is the proposed Medina house building for the seafront of Brighton and Hove. Brighton-based architect Lomax Cassidy & Edwards has produced designs for a residential development to replace a run-down semi-derelict

## Carey Jones plan for E-campus is dropped

Carey Jones' masterplan for a hi-tech business park in Sheffield was binned this week after the site's owners decided to keep some of the land.

Under the project, driven by Regional Development Agency Yorkshire Forward, Sheaf Street which is next to a bus park in the

a 60,000sq m development but as *BD* went to press it was not yet clear whether Carey Jones would be retained to develop it.

The search is likely to widen to other towns in south Yorkshire which would still qualify for the EU's Objective 1 funding for eco-

# Commercial Property

22 Tuesday, 22 August 2000 The Scotsman

## 'Greek' Thomson restoration scheme sustains double blow

### Glasgow project in doubt after LEC refuses funding

Ken Houston

HOPES of saving a building of major historical significance in Glasgow, and the last major commercial design by the celebrated Victorian architect, Alexander "Greek" Thomson, have been dealt a double blow following two setbacks to the proposed redevelopment scheme.

Firstly, Historic Scotland has decided it will not review an application for support for the scheme until November instead of this month as was originally planned. This means that on-site work will not now commence until February next year, three months later than intended; however Derek Souter, the man behind the scheme said that this was a problem of timing which he hoped would be "relatively minor".

More serious, he believes, is the decision by Scottish Enterprise Glasgow not to back the scheme financially - although the organisation had agreed financial support for an earlier restoration scheme which, claim.s Mr Souter, was inferior to his own.

Said Mr Souter, boss of Dundee-based Union Street Developments: "I understand why the Historic Scotland review is being delayed but it would have been beneficial to the fabric of the building if we could have started the work prior to the winter onslaught. The building has had some temporary repair work but the longer we delay the greater the potential for additional costs to be incurred. However a good relationship is building with Historic Scotland and this should see the scheme progressing further at the next scheduled meeting.

"Of more significance is the decision by Scottish Enterprise Glasgow, after 18 months of meetings and discussions, not



Union Street, Glasgow in the fifties, when the upper floors of the Egyptian Halls (located halfway down on the left) were still in public use

to provide £245,000 grant assistance. Considering the same level of assistance was awarded to the previous scheme in November 1997, ourselves and the other parties involved, Superdrug, Birthdays and CIS, are more than a little perplexed."

Mr Souter said he found "bewildering" the length of time it had taken Scottish Enterprise Glasgow to come to its decision. He continued: "Unless the required grant funding is reconciled the building repairs could be delayed until this funding is-

sue is resolved. This could lead to the Egyptian Halls degenerating to a point that will make its return to commercial use virtually impossible or at a dramatically increased cost to the budget presently proposed."

He said SEG had expressed concern that the end use of the building was not known but Mr Souter said he was unable to give SEG that commitment until all the funding was in place. Once the building has been restored and made inhabitable, several options would become

available to office, retail or leisure users.

He continued: "The previous ownership and accountability problems that have beset the building are a thing of the past. The funding mechanic USP put in place is exactly the same as the last scheme and this was awarded £245,000 from Scottish Enterprise Glasgow. If this was not in place the project would be blocked by all the public bodies concerned on the basis the project was not financially viable.

"With £1.5 million of the project funding in place (£1.4m of it from the private sector) it is now up to Scottish Enterprise Glasgow to reconsider its positions and Historic Scotland to consider the scheme favourably in November."

However, when I contacted the headquarters of Scottish Enterprise Glasgow yesterday, there did not appear to be much sign that a change of mind was on the cards.

SEG Spokesman Alan Dignon said: "This scheme no longer fits in with the current projects we are working on, which are setting up new industrial sites and encouraging inward investment, and which are set for us by the government."

Mr Dignon admitted that Scottish Enterprise Glasgow had earlier committed money to the Egyptian Halls project but added: "That was three years ago and the world has moved on since then. We now have other priorities and this building is no longer one of them."

Dr Gavin Stamp, architectural historian and head of the Greek Thomson Society, said he was "obviously dismayed" by news of the latest delay. "This seemed to be a very good scheme," he added.

Meanwhile, as he readily admits, Mr Souter is unlikely to lose out whatever the outcome. If further serious delay was to scupper the scheme and no viable alternative was available, then application could be made to allow the building to be demolished, which would make him the owner of a valuable, cleared city centre site. But Mr Souter insisted yesterday that he did not want that scenario. He added: "We have not come this far to give up now. I want to deliver a scheme which sees the Egyptian Halls restored to its former glory."

## Work starts on £2.5m technology centre

CONSTRUCTION has started on a £2.5 million technology centre for Mitsui Babcock Park, Renfrew.

Mr Akira Satake, executive, visited the site out the formal ground-breaking ceremony last Thursday.

Some 210 engineering personnel will be employed within the 10,000 sq ft development, where Mitsui Babcock occupies major workshops of 723,000 sq ft. The centre has its UK operations in a separate office of 77,000 sq ft. The scheme is expected to be completed in six months' time.

The new will include high quality office space, advanced laboratories and workspace for test activities carried out by the research and development and technical capabilities company and allow product ranges to be developed to meet the requirements of what has become a demanding and competitive market.

Richard Exley, managing director of MEPC Business Development said: "The development represents an investment in confidence for the future of our companies. It is a major investment in standards, and represents an ideal co-operative approach to our economic development partners."

Babcock Park covers 100,000 sq ft of large shed accommodation on 130 acres, which is currently home to another 10 companies, ranging from electronics manufacturer, to haulier W H Malcolm.

## Squaring

HALLDALE has completed a major extension to its 50,000 sq ft shopping centre in Leeds. The development comprises four new floors, retail units with a total area of 7,000

# Glasgow's remarkable Egyptian Halls

From the archive

25 Aug 2000

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.

# The man who built Glasgow

Alexander Linklater

21 Jun 1999

Alexander Linklater welcomes the belated recognition for an architect whose work stands comparison with that of Rennie Mackintosh. Alexander "Greek" Thomson has, at long last, been officially invited back home to Glasgow. Banners in George Square sport his profile equally with that of Charles Rennie Mackintosh. The Clydesdale bank has started using the same image of Thomson for its #20 notes. And, most importantly, a major exhibition of his work, due to open this weekend, inaugurates the Lighthouse museum on Mitchell Street as the central focus of Glasgow's year of Architecture and Design. It is, in fact, the only exhibition exclusively dedicated to the city which Glasgow 1999 is staging. Certainly, there should have been more. With hindsight, it becomes clear that the recent ill-attended Vertigo exhibition theorising future world cities would have had broader appeal and vision if it had specified the substance of its home city instead. But if you are going to do Glasgow, then there is no single figure from the entire cultural history of the city better to represent it than Thomson. The fact that in the last 40 years Glasgow itself has so comprehensively failed its greatest creator only emphasises the drama of this exhibition. Most of the 100 or so buildings that Thomson designed between 1849 and 1875 survived until the 1960s. Thereafter, they began to vanish with terrifying speed. Extensive blocks of his tenements in Gorbals and Tradeston fell victim to the infamous demolition programmes. Unnecessarily, so did commercial buildings in Bath Street and villas in Pollokshields and Shawlands. Thomson's finest tenements, at Queen's Park Terrace, were pulled down as late as the 1980s. Caledonia Road Church, one of the greatest Victorian churches ever built, barely survives as a ruin. Of all the buildings Thomson designed, less than two thirds remain. It is only very recently that Glasgow, not to mention Scotland as a whole, has woken up to Thomson. The National Trust for Scotland has recently refurbished Holmwood House, his finest villa. If an ownership feud surrounding the Egyptian Halls in Union Street is resolved, his finest commercial building may also re-emerge from decline. And the selection of St Vincent Street Church as a World Heritage Site looks set to save his only still-living church. The urgency of this concerns far more than the mere preservation of heritage scraps. In a dazzling introduction to the illustrated book which accompanies Glasgow 1999's exhibition, curator Gavin Stamp frees Thomson from the past, brandishes him as one of Scotland's major creative originals, and sets him up as a key inspiration for innovators of the future. It is not as a simple revivalist - "Greek" or classical or otherwise - that Thomson stamped his mark on architectural history. Rather Thomson's aspiration to dis-cover fundamental laws in ancient Greek or Egyptian styles which drove him to the threshold of a structural abstraction. "We do not contrive rules; we dis-cover laws," Thomson once declared with characteristic zeal. "There is such a thing as architectural truth." Ever since the Alexander "Greek" Thomson society was established in 1991, Gavin Stamp has been one of a few stalwarts who have championed Thomson as the "Unknown Genius". As the title of the exhibition he has co-curated with filmmaker Murray Grigor (whose film on Thomson, *Nineveh on the Clyde*, screens later in June), this has now come full circle as a meaningless phrase. The contents of Stamp's book of the same name says it all: Thomson built villas, terraces, tenements, commercial buildings, churches and monuments. He was Glasgow's cardinal city maker. Stamp sees the revival of Thomson for Glasgow 1999 as a civic symbol, conceding that "official attitudes have now changed." But he doesn't believe Thomson's real importance was ever really forgotten. "Ordinary Glaswegians never ignored him," says Stamp. "I don't think he's ever been forgotten." Destruction of Thomson, whether intentional or not, has left holes in the civic memory. At the centre of the exhibition a huge and miraculously reconstructed model of the Queen's Park Church, bombed into extinction during the war, is an amazing reminder of the force of imagination which once drove a city. Reconstructed capitals from columns in the St Vincent Street church demonstrate that it was an ambition brilliant with interior colour as well as structural ingenuity. Here is Thomson being exhibited in a building designed by the normally more celebrated Charles Rennie Mackintosh which demonstrates that - in terms of originality alone - Glasgow possessed at least two architects of equal genius. Thomson emerges from the very centre of Victorian Glasgow, and in many respects represents the glowering ambitions of his times. But his use of the "Greek" can be deceptive. "How is it . . . there is no modern style in architecture?" he asked in 1871. His solution was "to abandon with all convenient expedition the whole mass of accumulated human traditions under which we have been, as it were, smothered." "Greek" Thomson was neither, precisely speaking, a neo-classicist nor, exactly, an early modernist. His were the fierce outlines of a genuine original.

## Legal battle threatens Greek Thomson's masterpiece

| [Sunday Herald, The, Jun 13, 1999](#) | by [Darran Gardner](#)

A VITAL restoration plan to save Alexander 'Greek' Thomson's most celebrated architectural masterpiece has stalled after becoming a casualty of a bitter legal wrangle between a suspended accountant and an ex-football club chairman.

The battle for ownership of Thomson's landmark Egyptian Halls on Glasgow's Union Street is being fought between Tom Dyer, an accountant suspended from his professional body for cheating a bankrupt out of #80,000 and Derek Souter, who resigned his vice- chairmanship of Dundee FC in disgust at the club's links to Giovanni Di Stefano, the controversial Anglo-Italian businessman and friend of Serbian warlord Arkan.

Both men currently own a key part of the threatened property. The restoration project, originally intended to be the highlight of Glasgow's City of Architecture and Design celebrations, is now scheduled for 2000, having been at the mercy of legal negotiations since the early 1990s. Glasgow City Council has backed Souter's bid to redevelop the building, having previously initiated a compulsory purchase notice against the property - citing failure to comply with repair orders - in a desperate bid to save the listed property. Dyer claims he was not given enough time to carry out the repair work. Souter's company, Union Street Properties (USP), is involved in advanced negotiations to purchase two street-level shop units, currently occupied by an insurance company and a London-based businessman. This would give USP control of the entire ground level and all but half of the upper floors, which are owned by Dyer's company, Paratus Ltd. Despite the compulsory purchase notice, which is currently awaiting a Court of Session hearing and will be pursued by the city council unless he agrees to sell to Souter, Dyer appears reluctant to sell, claiming he has a plan to develop the property into a hotel and restaurant complex. His refusal to sell continues to block restoration work. In 1998, Dyer was found guilty of professional misconduct by the Institute of Chartered Accountant's Disciplinary Committee after an investigation into allegations that he cheated a bankrupt and his creditors out of an estimated #80,000. He was ordered to pay costs of #18,000 and was suspended from the institute for three years. Remedial work on the building's exterior began at the end of last year, with the interior being stripped in preparation for future construction work. Those involved include architects Morrison Partnerships and engineers Peter Stephen and Partners. According to George Morrison, a senior partner at Morrison Partnerships, the building, while in terrible shape, can be saved: "The building is in better shape than we feared. We have stripped out all the secondary work that has been done over the years and returned it to the original form.

We hope to see a significant step forward in the next month or so." The history of the Egyptian Halls is complex. Built in 1871, using cast iron and stone, the Halls turned architectural wisdom on its head. The Halls were designed 'upside down', featuring thick stone columns - usually found at ground level - on the top floor, as well as featuring pioneering glass frontage shops at street level. Dr Gavin Stamp, architectural historian and head of the Greek Thomson Society, admits that few in Glasgow realise the importance of the building: "Egyptian Halls wasn't just a warehouse, it was a shopping centre cum bazaar, with promenade concerts inside. It was a Glasgow institution." In 1991, the building was in such bad condition that the council issued a repair order to a Hong Kong restaurateur who owned part of the upper floors. In 1995, this property interest was sold to Dyer. According to the Land Registry office in Glasgow, ownership of the building through a variety of sales and leases, with the property falling into a "black hole". Other Thomson landmarks such as the Caledonian Road Church and the St Vincent Street Church have also fallen into disrepair, with a cash-strapped council and other grant-making bodies like Historic Scotland unable to fund essential restoration. Don Bennett, deputy director of Development and Regeneration Services at Glasgow City Council, admits that with a reduced #400,000 conservation budget, battles such as that over the Egyptian Halls only make things harder. "There are an awful lot of listed building in Glasgow. We'd like to save every one, but we'll never have the resources to do that. If we step in, it invariably takes money from elsewhere. We just can't afford to invest in every one." Born in Stirlingshire in 1817, Alexander Thomson is widely considered to be one of the most remarkable architects to work in Scotland. His ability to design distinctive yet classical buildings earned him the nickname 'Greek'. As part of the city's architecture and design year, Thomson's work will be celebrated in a new exhibition at The Lighthouse later this month, but the future of his greatest work remains in the balance. Tom Dyer was unavailable for comment. I See also Directory

# Fears over fall of the Egyptians

Iain Wilson Chief Reporter 7May 1998

exclusive another Alexander "Greek" Thomson building is under threat despite a #3m restoration scheme planned as part of Glasgow's celebrations of its year as UK City of Architecture, 1999. The Egyptian Halls in Union Street, dubbed the most magnificent of Greek Thomson's commercial designs, are the subject of a compulsory purchase order by the city council. However, it was confirmed yesterday that one of the former owners, whose original stake in the building was less than 50%, has mounted an eleventh-hour legal challenge against the order. **The appeal is being supported by Mr Tom Dyer, who claims a "development interest" in the property. Mr Dyer, a former racehorse trainer and accountant, was found guilty in March of professional misconduct by the Institute of Chartered Accountants' Disciplinary Committee.** Restoration work has now been postponed pending the appeal, which is unlikely to be heard at the Court of Session for at least 10 months, according to the Alexander Thomson Society. It fears that winter will have taken an irreparable toll on the property by then. Society chairman Gavin Stamp said of any delay in the legal process: "It is most alarming because, when the matter is finally resolved, the necessary grants may have to be renegotiated, if still available. "In addition, the agreed end user may well have lost patience and moved on. Above all, there is the real risk that in its present state the Egyptian Halls cannot survive another bad winter." Mr Stamp also questioned if Mr Dyer and others could raise the #2.3m required to refurbish the building. He added: "What is certain, however, is that the future of the Egyptian Halls is in jeopardy and may thus make a mockery of Glasgow's Year of Architecture and Design. The major Thomson exhibition planned for 1999 could be marked by the loss of one of the architect's finest creations." In April, the city council secured #100,000 towards restoring the Egyptian Halls, and proposals have been agreed with tenants and a potential occupier of the abandoned upper floors. The council is supported by Historic Scotland and other relevant bodies, while the compulsory purchase order was confirmed by the Scottish Secretary. The appeal has thrown a spanner in the works, with time now running out to restore the halls as centrepiece of the Thomson exhibition, let alone as part of year of architecture celebrations. In March, Mr Dyer was fined #5000 and ordered to pay costs of #18,000 after an investigation by the Institute of Chartered Accountants into allegations that he cheated a bankrupt and his creditors out of an estimated #80,000. Mr Dyer, convicted at Dundee Sheriff Court of assaulting a business colleague in 1995, was also suspended from the institute for three years. The punishment took place despite an attempt by Mr Dyer to obtain a Court of Session interdict against the disciplinary proceedings. Last night, a city council spokesman dismissed a potential 10-month gap in hearing the former owner's appeal as speculation. He added: "Anything which has to be done to avoid further erosion of the property will be done." That could involve billing owners for urgent work. Mr Stamp said the Alexander Thomson Society will settle for the building being saved, even if refurbishment cannot be completed in 1999. However, he argued: "The slowness of the legal process is failing Glasgow, its citizens and its historic architecture." Mr Dyer, who is understood to be considering an appeal against the accountants' disciplinary actions, could not be contacted.