

## THE OLD ATHENAEUM

### A Century At The Heart Of Theatre in Glasgow

The Old Athenaeum building has a strange history, being developed as a series of "add-ons" to the original structures to accommodate the ever growing needs of the original owners, the School Of Music of the Glasgow Athenaeum.

The Glasgow Athenaeum began its life in what is now the Athenaeum Building commercial centre on the North Side of Nelson Mandela Place - originally St George's Place. To the north of that building was St George's Court (a lane running East-West from Buchanan Street to West Nile Street) with a row of one story buildings facing the back of The Athenaeum Building.

In 1890 these buildings to the North of St George's Court were developed by the Glasgow Athenaeum, and linked to the original building by a bridge. The middle section of the row was built up to 3 floors, with a large gymnasium where the current auditorium is.

By 1892, plans were being formulated to turn the gymnasium into a Concert Hall. Original plans show a much smaller space, incorporating only the current Circle, with the stage some two feet higher than it currently is. ~~Seats would have risen from this level to meet the existing circle.~~ The final set of plans show an alternative version putting the stage in the basement, allowing for a new level of stalls seating - producing a final total capacity of 680 seats.

Part of these plans involved the redevelopment of the original one-storey building which faced onto Buchanan Street to match the height of this middle section, and The Old Athenaeum frontage as we now recognise it appeared for the first time.

At about this time, the building to the west also became available for the Athenaeum's use, and the decision was made to incorporate this space into the performance area design, and extend the Concert platform to produce a full Proscenium Arch stage area with full backstage facilities and wings.

When dressing room and corridors were fitted in back stage, it became apparent that the depth of the stage was insufficient to be practical, and a decision was taken to extend the stage out into the auditorium and erect a false proscenium arch. In effect this meant destroying the original lay out of the circular ceiling and curved balconies.

Large iron pillars had to be erected to carry the load of the building above, which had seriously detrimental effects on access to the stage for the actors, and also impeded some of the sight-lines for the audience. The final seating capacity was 615.

This new theatre opened in 1893, and was soon at the centre of amateur dramatics in the city, with all the major companies performing here. The Orpheus Club, which celebrates it's Centenary here in October, were one of the early users, as was the Glasgow Citizens Theatre and the Glasgow Unity Players.

The School of Music developed into the Scottish National Academy of Music, which, with the addition of a College of Dramatic Art finally became the Royal Scottish Academy of Music And Drama. As well as the large auditorium, the School of Music had the use of several floors of music rooms, whilst the Academy stretched over all the buildings along St George's Place and back to The Old Athenaeum.

In 1967 the Scottish Education Department sanctioned a programme of further development, improving the technical facilities of the auditorium and installing a heating system.

In 1987 the RSAMD were ready to move in to their new, purpose-built premises on Hope Street - including The New Athenaeum performance space. Scottish Youth Theatre entered discussions for taking over the The Old Athenaeum section of the Academy's premises.

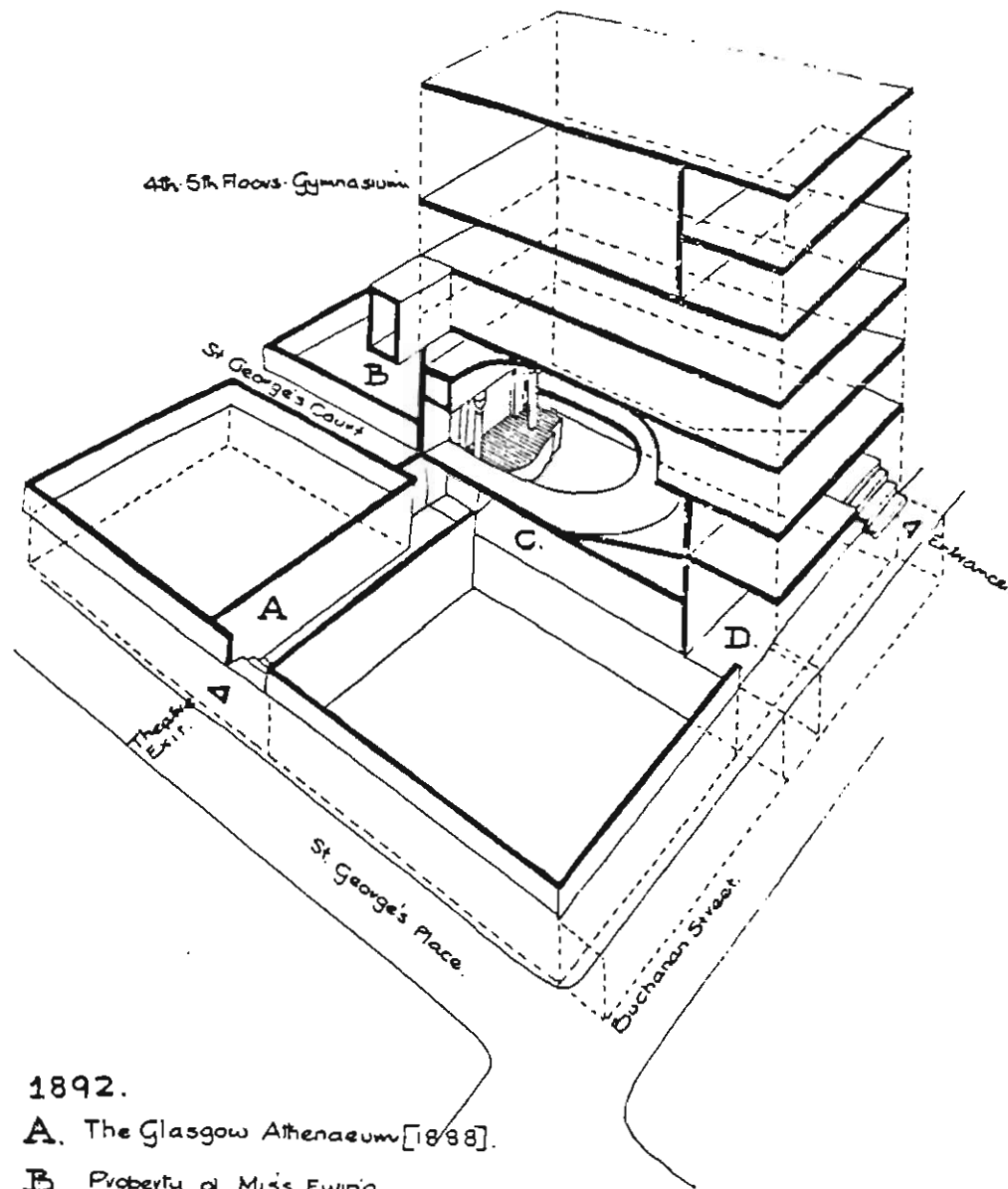
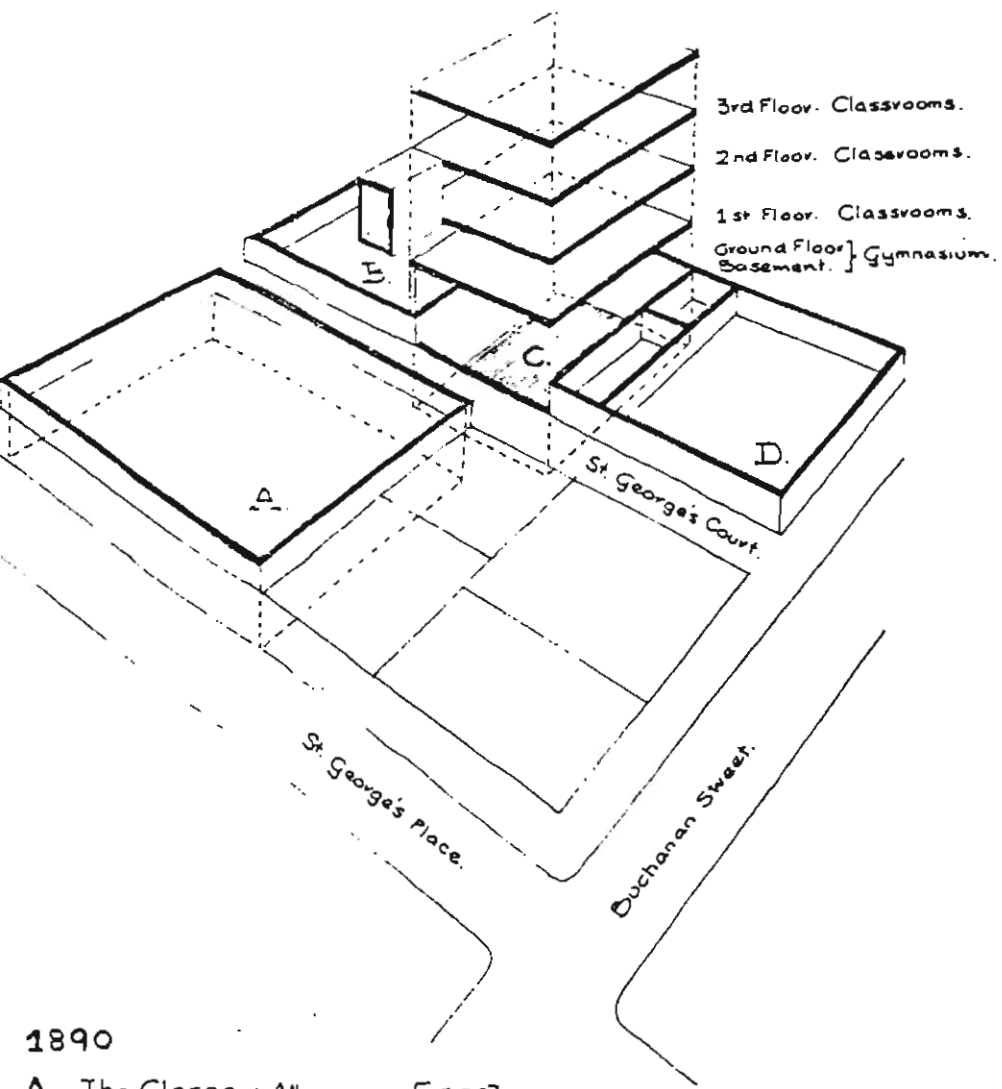
By 1989 the deal was struck, and The Old Athenaeum belonged to Scottish Youth Theatre. Another major renovation was involved - separating the building from the others that it had previously been connected to; installing new heating plant and fire escapes. Within the auditorium, the back section of the stalls were closed off to build in a new bar and a technical control room; and a new large box office was created at the entrance level. The seating capacity is now 367. Under it's new owners The Old Athenaeum opened in May 1990 as part of Glasgow's celebrations as European Capital of Culture.

The changes continue... In July 1992 a Second Phase of refurbishment was started. Two further levels of the building were opened up for general usage and the building was launched as a Youth Arts Centre for the country. Once again the whole building is used for drama classes and rehearsals, with the auditorium programmed with the widest range of cultural performances for young people - concerts, cabaret, theatre, dance, etc.

Throughout the summer - under the auspices of Glasgow Development Agency - the outside of the building (now listed as a Grade A building) was cleaned and prepared for floodlighting.

The Second Phase continues over the Winter of this year, when the auditorium will close for several months to facilitate re-padding and re-covering of the seating; and further refurbishment of the Bar and Foyer areas.

Despite generous funding from Glasgow City Council and a grant from the Sports And Arts Foundation, the continuing development of The Old Athenaeum also depends upon public support and a Seat Sponsorship scheme was launched earlier this year.



1890

1892.

A. The Glasgow Athenaeum [1888].

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B. Property of Miss Ewing.

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C. Property of The Glasgow Athenaeum. Developed as Gymnasium and Classrooms. Bridge to Building A.

C. Property of Glasgow Athenaeum.

D. Property of The Glasgow Athenaeum.

D. Developed as Concert Hall at Basement and Ground Floor Levels, with Classrooms on five floors above. Gymnasium on 4th 5th Floors. Link to Bldg. A by bridges over St. George's Court and at Basement level.