

A Brave New World?

The Club is thriving, with the studio occupied every day and the dining room working to capacity at lunchtime on most days, including Saturdays. The membership is growing steadily and the members joining are active and involved.

The problem is that the building itself has limitations. We cannot offer full and reliable access to those unable to cope with the stairs. The stair lift which is now over 10 years old has required repair twice in the last year, and, because it is so slow, is rarely used.

However, the most serious issue is that at nearly 200 years old the building is showing its age. The roof didn't get the overhaul we planned four years ago and the stonework needs urgent attention. 12 years ago, a full improvement programme was costed at £400k. It is no less now and is even more urgent as the plumbing and drains are failing. For example, we had to buy a new water tank this year to replace one that was being held together by its insulation!

As much as we love the building and its location, its garden and its history, if we want to stay we have to raise at least £500K in order to put it in good order. All the recent improvements have been helpful but are basically cosmetic: we have applied lipstick when plastic surgery is needed!

Whilst that option remains open. it is important to realise that even with that massive expenditure we would still have no lift, and the number and size of the rooms is limiting our activities.

It was clear that a move would have to be to somewhere substantially better, with step-free access, separate access for the general public and a good performance space. It would also have to be in central Edinburgh, preferably the New Town. Although the brief sounds almost impossible, there is a building which fits those criteria and is, furthermore, an amazingly appropriate building for the Club. It is Raeburn House in York Place.



Discussions are currently being held to work out how this can be achieved but have now reached the stage where the membership as a whole can, and should become involved. Please feel free to ask questions and make suggestions. The next page describes the exciting opportunity which has arisen.

Raeburn House, 32 York Place, Edinburgh

32 York Place is the house in which Henry Raeburn painted, and where he met many of the major figures of the late 18th and early 19th century. The convivial meeting of interested and interesting people did much to fuel and sustain the Scottish Enlightenment, and, a century later, the Scottish Arts Club was born of the same ideals when 24 Rutland Square was bought to be a place where 'artists of all disciplines and like-minded people could meet'.

In 2001 there was a failed appeal to find an appropriate and sustainable use for Raeburn House and since then it has been stripped of much of its original features and has served as office space.

Now, the opportunity has arisen to purchase the building for a little over £3 million and ensure it can be used once more as a centre of artistic enterprise and discourse. The Scottish Arts Club could provide not only £1m towards the total cost, but also a compatible purpose, an ongoing income and a management structure.

32 York Place consists of the original building, which would largely serve as a new home for the Scottish Arts Club; a stunning extension which will provide public access to a customised performance space and gallery; and to the rear, a mews building with office space and a green room.

The Scottish Arts Club will bring in revenue in the form of its membership and its daily use as a restaurant and bar. Classes, dinners, receptions, recitals and other events would provide a further source of income and would bring a new energy to an historic venue. Exhibitions and performances will showcase work by living artists, performers, composers and playwrights. The Scottish Arts Club Charitable Trust already promotes the annual Scottish Portrait Awards, and the Short Story competition. The Club itself runs a Theatre Award and is a registered Fringe venue. All these initiatives would be enhanced by the larger and more dynamic premises.

Henry Raeburn himself will be honoured by displaying his work in one of his old studios, with the windows he had installed specially to catch the north light. In all these ways, the building will be made accessible to all those with the desire to explore and share their interest in the arts and will help restore the creative vibrancy it had when it was first built.
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