



Citizens Theatre statues returned to former glory before journey to Glasgow venue's new rooftop

By BRIAN FERGUSON

They have been inextricably linked with one of Scotland's best-known theatres for nearly 150 years, surviving the threat of fire, demolition and pollution, and the impact of Glasgow's climate.

Now the Citizens Theatre's celebrated statues have been finally returned to their former glory ahead of being returning to the roof of the Victorian venue as part of an ongoing £20 million makeover.

Painstaking repair and restoration work has been carried out on the works of art – which depict Robert Burns, William Shakespeare and the muses of music, comedy, tragedy and

dance from Greek mythology – during the redevelopment, which began in 2019.

Several features have been re-made by Glasgow sculptor David Mitchell and his team, using photographs of the sculptures, which date back to 1878 when the then Her Majesty's Theatre opened.

Now the statues, which have had a specialist coating to protect them from future weather-related damage, are planned to become a “dramatic new focal point” for the Gorbals area when the are installed on the roof of the new-look Citizens.

The theatre and the next door Grand National Halls, which later became the Palace Theatre were built, along

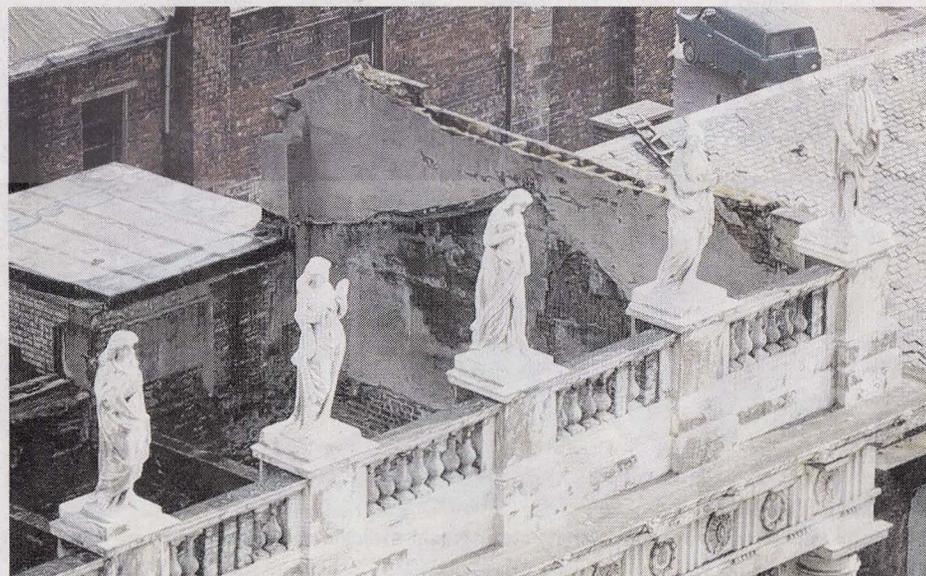
with a number of adjacent tenements, by developer John Morrison.

Originally created by Glasgow sculptor John Mossman, the statues used to sit on top of columns on the shared frontage of the two venues. But they were almost lost forever after a devastating fire in 1973.

Although the tenements and the Palace building were knocked down, the Citizens was saved from demolition and the statues were put into storage by the council.

When the Citizens underwent a major redevelopment in the 1980s, they were given a home inside its new foyer, where they remained for the next 30 years.

Robert Carlyle, Alan Cumming and Robbie Coltrane are



among the stars to have performed at the Citizens, which boasts the UK's most complete working Victorian theatre machinery.

Head of production Graham Sutherland said: “The statues had suffered all sorts of damage that needed to be remedied.

“When they were previously on the outside, they'd suffered from pollution and weathering. They'd also been coated in white paint when they were out there that was now flaking off, but had eaten into and damaged the surface of the sandstone.

“Various bits of stonework had been broken off, some of which had been diligently kept

by the staff, but others were completely lost.

“Other parts were broken but still hanging on that would need to be securely fixed. There was also damage and gaps that had been crudely filled with an inappropriate mortar that would need to be gently ragged out and repaired.

“Other statues had bits that had gone missing completely, but that we had photographic records of.”

Mr Mitchell said: “The statues were in very poor condition and needed some tender love and care. Bits were missing, features were crumbling and they were quite literally being held together with paint.

↑ Repair and restoration work has been carried out on the works of art – which depict Robert Burns, William Shakespeare and the muses of music, comedy, tragedy and dance from Greek mythology

“It was my desire to have them returned, as much as possible, to the state the artist had originally intended. As a sculptor and a Glaswegian, I felt that it was my duty to pay homage to the original sculptor, John Mossman, one of the greatest artists that Glasgow has ever produced, and save his work for future generations.”

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