

# History of the RBS building which will make way for the Dunard Centre

The 1960s brutalist building in the tight space behind the former RBS HQ in St Andrew Square will be demolished to make way for the new Concert Hall being built there.

The building adjoins the rear of the grand bank building which is set back from the square with a garden in front. The contractors explained that although machines will be used at the beginning to demolish most of the structure before workers have to remove the part closest to the older section by hand.

It was particularly fascinating to hear from Ruth Reed who is Head of Archives and Art at RBS about the history of the area as a garden and pleasure ground in the north of the city.

Helping everyone to say farewell Ruth Reed Head of Archives and Art at RBS talked about the building's past as the building was set for demolition. She explained that the building we were standing in was originally constructed to house a computer.

And above in some archive footage from RBS, you can see the computer arriving on the back of several trucks.

Ruth said to the assembled dignitaries and press: "I am really delighted to be able to be here to say a little bit about the history of this place. Every place has its story to tell.

“And this story begins even before the building of Edinburgh New Town, when this place was no town at all. It was open country to the north of Edinburgh, so that city residents could come out here for a pleasant country walk with beautiful views out to Fife.

“And somewhere near here there was a tavern that was called Peace and Plenty. In all of that time as the Royal Bank grew, its requirements grew and the building was extended out backwards, and the gardens were pushed into the corners.

“But this land still had its moments. In the First World War the bank gave over this site to staff allotments for the bank, Clark’s could grow sustenance for themselves and their families while there were food shortages.

“Now today, a new chapter begins. Now, when we celebrate new enterprises, we like to cut ribbons or smash bottles. But what do we do to mark their ending? Well, if you’re building a new concert hall you play them out, which is why I’m so glad that Su-a Lee is here today to play us not a lament but a love song, a song about partings but also a giving of thanks for what has been a blessing. This building is going and what replaces it is going to be remarkable. And one day soon, just like long ago, people will flock here looking for that peace and plenty.”

The archivist also told us: “The Royal Bank of Scotland has had its home here for nearly 200 years – we’ll be celebrating 200 years here later this decade. And coincidentally we’ll also be celebrating 300 years of the Royal Bank of Scotland itself.

“This building which is going to be demolished for the new concert hall was built in the mid 1960s to house the Royal Bank of Scotland very first computer. You needed a whole office block in those days to house the computer in the people and the people to operate it.”

Work on the [new concert hall](#) began in February and is due to open in 2026. You can peek through the gate on Elder Street at St James Square to follow progress, but there is little or no view from St Andrew Square.

David Chipperfield Architects are behind the design of the building working with Edinburgh firm Reiach and Hall. Chipperfield describe the new Dunard Centre (named after the philanthropic fund which is providing tens of millions to pay for the new building) in this way: “

The building’s functions are distributed within three refined yet compact and intersecting volumes. The concert hall sits in the centre within a pure elliptical form; its shape and scale dictated by the acoustic requirements and its position on the site. The hall volume rises above the neighbouring buildings as an urban gesture which terminates the axial view east along George Street, with Dundas House prominently in the foreground. The venue’s overlapping lower volumes are orthogonal in form and house its ancillary and public functions. These help to reduce the overall mass of the building and anchor it within the scale, geometry and atmosphere of the surrounding lanes, pocket gardens, and neighbouring buildings.

“The façades of the new venue relate to the architecture of the New Town in both their order and materiality. The expression of a base, middle and top, found on other neoclassical buildings, is picked up by the composition of the venue’s massing while the texture and tone of its concrete references the various sandstones found in the New Town. The character of the public realm is set by the architecture of the building and borrows from the scenography of the context creating a series of varied, interconnected spaces between the venue and its different approaches.”



The work began on the Dunard Centre on 6 February with a visit from UK and Scottish Government Ministers as well as the Council Leader to listen to Ae Fond Kiss by Su-a Lee Assistant Principal Cello at Scottish Chamber Orchestra ©2023 The Edinburgh Reporter



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