

The Trades Hall

One of the first things the Trades House decided to do was to take over and co-ordinate an existing scheme by some of the Crafts to establish an Almshouse – this was situated at the corner of Cathedral Street and the High Street, more or less under part of the Barony Hall of Strathclyde University. At first the Trades House and Incorporated Crafts held their meetings there or in Tron St Mary's Church but sometimes in public houses or the accommodation then known as the Laigh Session House of the Cathedral. Towards the end of the 18th Century however, they decided that while a meeting hall was still required, greater good could be more widely dispersed throughout Glasgow by closing the Almshouse and distributing what was then known as 'outdoor relief' to the poor. (The 18th century version of 'Care in the Community').

Accordingly, in 1791 Scotland's best known architect Robert Adam was instructed to build the present Hall. The foundation stone was laid on 9th September and the building was first used on Deacons' Choosing Day in September 1794, at a time when the roof works were still incomplete. When Robert Adam died in 1792 his two younger brothers who were also his business partners, took responsibility for overseeing the building of the Hall.

The façade of the Trades Hall is one of the finest of all Robert Adam's designs originally comprising of a block of five bays with the emphasis on the central entranceway and outer bays. Adam gave variety and movement through the different heights of the windows, the stepping forward of the end bays and the use of columns so that, as one observer commented 'the building almost appears modelled in light and shade'.

The Hall was originally built with small pavilions with pyramidal roofs at each end. In 1837-38, David Hamilton, who may actually have worked on the building in its first phase with the Adam partnerships, extended the South pavilion upwards (when building the Saloon) and in 1888 James Sellars did the same as a fire escape from the new kitchen. (Hamilton built among other things, Hutchesons' Hall and the former Stirling's Library and Sellars the Merchants' Hall, Frasers in Buchanan Street and the St Andrew's Halls.)

The cost of completing and furnishing the building from 1791 to 1802 was £7,927 18s 6d of which the Trades House paid £4,700 9s 7d, and the Incorporation of Bonnetmakers and Dyers £25 19s 1d. It is the only major Adam work surviving in Glasgow, and the oldest building (apart from the mediaeval cathedral) still used for its original purpose, that being a public hall.

The building was refaced by John Keppie RSA, a former Deacon of the Skinners, in 1927, and David Miller, also a Skinner, restored the large venetian windows to the Grand Hall, so that despite a variety of alterations down the years, the overall appearance of the façade retains Adam's lines and movement, with a neo-classical silhouette.

Saloon

When the Trades Hall was opened in 1794, this room, known as the Saloon, did not exist. It was added in 1838 by the architect David Hamilton. He originally trained as a stonemason and became a member of the Incorporation of Wrights in 1800. It seems likely that he had a close connection with Robert Adam and may have trained in the office of the Adam practice. Indeed it is even possible that he could have been involved with the Trades Hall during the years 1791-94 when it was designed and built.

Certainly by 1803 Hamilton was beginning to establish his reputation as an architect of some talent, and today buildings like Hutchesons' Hospital, just round the corner in Ingram Street, and Royal Exchange Square, off Buchanan Street, stand testament to his skill.

As one of the city's most eminent architects, he was chosen by the Trades House to design two major extensions to the building. This room formed part of his later work which dates from 1837. At this time, although the Trades Hall had only stood for forty years, there was already a need to modernise the Hall's facilities to create cloakroom accommodation beneath this room, and former Schoolroom accommodation above. The House expended £1,197.7s 3d in building this extension, which in yet another alteration, was refurbished by John Keppie in 1916 during the Great War.

The Saloon was used for the first time on 1 October 1838. Since then this room has been the normal meeting place of the Trades House and is frequently let for meetings, dinners, receptions and seminars. Not much is known of David Hamilton's original decorative scheme for the Saloon, as none of his drawings survive. Most of what you see today dates from 1916. John Keppie already had an understanding of the building, having worked for James Sellars in the 1888 additions, and when Sellars died Keppie left the practice to form his own partnership.

Keppie's work to the Saloon included the new mahogany panelling with its record of donations (with the first being given in 1613) to the Trades House and the Crafts, applied in gold paint. Reading these panels gives you a good idea of the type of people who were members or connected to the Trades House. Many of the benefactors stipulated how their money was to be used and these purposes ranged from scholarships and educational purposes, to training apprentices, and providing financial help to poor and unmarried daughters. To the left of the fireplace you can see the record of James Buchanan's bequest of £10,000, and to the right, James McLennan's donation is recorded. At the top of the mahogany panels you can see a number of armorial bearings including those of the fourteen Incorporated Trades.

When the Trades House meets here the room is laid out like a traditional Council Chamber or Parliament Hall with a large table down the middle. The Deacon Convener, Collector and Clerk sit at its head with the previous Convener and Collector, and down its sides sit the Deacons and Visitor in Craft order with the other trades representatives behind them. Each of the fourteen Crafts elects a Deacon, except the Maltmen, who elect a Visitor – which means an Inspector or Overseer, and despite the different terminology, he nevertheless fulfils the same functions as a Deacon.

The Deacon Convener's Chair of State was designed by David Hamilton and dates from 1819. You can see its fourteen well-polished silver shields each engraved with the Coats of Arms of the Incorporated Trades crest. At the top of the chair you can see the fourteen arrows again, with the motto 'Union is Strength'. Laurel wreaths, foliage and scrolls decorate the back and sides of the chair and its feet end in two powerful-looking claws.

The two smaller chairs, designed by Keppie, were made from former roof timbers of Glasgow Cathedral just before the First World War and were made in a traditional way using oak pins rather than nails or screws. James Grant made the chairs and John Grant carved them. They were the gift of Deacon Conveners William Beattie (who also paid for the windows) and Hugh Alexander.

The stained glass portraits were also added as part of Keppie's 1916 work and made by Glasgow glass stainers and decorators, Guthrie and Wells. (From right to left) show King James VI (the monarch at the time of the institution of the House), Deacon Convener William Beattie (who, although elected in 1913 is shown dressed as a Burgess of 1605) with his own Arms beneath, and finally Mary, Queen of Scots. Queen Mary's benefactions to the City included the grant of the Blackfriars Monastery (which had fallen to the Crown at the Reformation) as new premises for the University. The Glasgow Art Club has a portrait in the bar of William Beattie in contemporary dress at the turn of the twentieth century.

The ceiling was installed in 1955 by Walter Underwood. The original ceiling became badly cracked following a minor earthquake in 1932 and eventually had to be taken down.

When the Hall was constructed the white marble Adam fireplace was formerly at the South end of the Grand Hall. It was moved here when the building was remodelled by Keppie in 1916.

Ex Deacon Convener Percival Agnew, personally worked the firescreen showing the modern Arms of the Trades House. The electroliers came from the former Grosvenor Restaurant in Gordon Street, a favourite city eating house until it was destroyed by fire in 1970.

Other items of interest include the two metre long George III mahogany inlaid sideboard which was a gift to the Trades House in 1897. The carved onyx clock on the mantelpiece with the lion and unicorn was designed to commemorate Queen Elizabeth II's coronation in 1953.

The doors for the Saloon, giving access to the Grand Hall, are of Spanish mahogany presented by the members of the Trades House Masonic Lodge in 1930. While it is by no means necessary to be a lodge member to join one of the Trades House organisations, it is desirable to be a Craft member in order to join the lodge. Let us now go through those doors to the Grand Hall.

The Grand Hall

Much of this room (which originally formed the entire first floor) has changed since it was completed over two hundred years ago and the most recent work has been the magnificent windows to Adam's original design. Today the building remains Adam's only surviving work in Glasgow.

The room is symmetrical in design. Its three large arched windows and two smaller rectangular windows flood the room with light. Above the central window is the Trades House Coat of Arms. Stand below here and you have a good view down Garth Street in the heart of the Merchant City. This street was formerly known as Garthland, after the McDowalls of Castle Semple and Garthland. Indeed Colonel McDowall co-owned Shawfield Mansion with the wealthy merchant John Glassford. The mansion was later demolished and the Trades Hall built in its pear orchard. The central part of the building which you can see at the end of Garth Street was used as the Merchants' House from 1843 to 1877 when the Merchants moved to a new building in George Square. But for a period of thirty-four years the Trades Hall and the Merchants' House faced each other down this street.

In the Grand Hall the ceiling has twice been replaced, the first time by Hamilton in 1840 and secondly by Underwood in 1955, this time because traffic movement had made the plasterwork unsafe. The current ceiling is made of waxed and fireproofed avodire wood from West Africa, and was inspired by Hamilton's ceiling. Adam's ceiling was probably quite flat, with light plaster tracery. The ceiling is dominated by the seven metre dome. Around its base are the fourteen Coats of Arms of the Incorporated Trades, each bearing its motto.

James Sellars carried out work to the Grand Hall in 1888. He added the mahogany panelling around the walls and relaid the floor. The fireplace at the far end of the room is one of the few Adam elements which remain in the Grand Hall. Its partner which originally stood at the opposite end of the Hall is now in the Saloon next door.

The Frieze

Installed around the end of the Boer War, the painted and gilded frieze runs the entire perimeter of the Hall, stretching a distance of some sixty-four metres, or 210 feet in a styled and romantic way, depicting the work of the fourteen Incorporated Trades. It features 161 individual figures as well as a donkey, two pigs, two sheep and a cow. Little is known of the original Belgian artists who painted it, but whoever designed it was clearly familiar with the Grand Hall, designing it to tie in with the window arches and the large paintings at the end of the room.

Details of the Frieze

The long walls feature a total of ten trades, with two depicted on each of the shorter walls. Looking at the frieze, you can see the work of one of the fourteen trades in particular represented in all but two of the scenes.

- Commencing with the **Gardeners** ten figures plus a donkey are shown with the common tools of their trade including a rake, a watering can and secateurs. The figure at the front holds a post with the Gardeners' arms. Similar figures are depicted in each of the other scenes.
- Next come the **Barbers**: not quite a modern day Glasgow hairdressing salon, but little has changed, with customers preened and prepared, admiring the finished effect in the mirror. One thing that you probably wouldn't find today is the seated figure being shaved by an open blade.
- In the scene depicting the **Bonnetmakers and Dyers**, you can see figures holding fabric, dyeing it in large vats and hanging it up to dry. Next to this are the **Skinnners**, holding animal pelts and examining, cleaning and stretching them. Eleven **Bakers** are shown in the next scene, carrying bread and putting it in wicker baskets. One man kneels with a heavy sack over his shoulder, perhaps containing flour. They even seem to cater for the Scottish sweet tooth as one figure carries a fabulous cake. The **Weavers** are shown, working at looms and examining their cloth, a very significant industry in by-gone Glasgow.
- The Maltmen and Cordiners are depicted on the short wall. Of the fourteen figures in the **Maltmen's** scene, some shovel grain or hold baskets, others carry sacks and fill barrels. The jugs hanging up at the end are presumably for tasting the finished product. The **Cordiners**, known to the English as Cordwainers, were Cordoba-workers, the term deriving from Cordoba in Spain, which was a byword for excellent soft leathers in the middle ages. As the customer is given a fitting the craftsmen's booth in which she sits has numerous shoes hanging at the left hand side and more piled up in boxes. At the right hand side, the five figures at the workbench cut and shape the leather to make the next batch of shoes.

- Four scenes are shown along the wall with the windows. First are the **Tailors**, whose symbolic shears or scissors are carried by the figure with his back to us. You can see someone using scissors in the scene, another with the measuring tape, and a third sitting cross-legged on the table in traditional style.
- Next to the Tailors, the **Hammermen** display the tools of their trade: anvils, hammers and mells, while the furnace is stoked in the background. At the right is one of the Hammermen's leather aprons. Set before the Hammermen's heyday in the era of Clyde-built shipping the scene underplays their role as engineers.
- To the right of the central window the Wrights and Coopers are shown. The **Wrights** were mainly joiners and carpenters. Figures carry timber, plane wood at the workbench, and ply a long-handled sharp-bladed adze. Working on the scaffold at the far right you find a craftsman wielding mell and chisel, while the Craft emblem the set square – is at the left hand side of the scene.
- In the next scene you can see the **Coopers** making their barrels by putting the wooden staves together, ready to be held tight by the metal hoops lying in the foreground.
- The fourth wall depicts the Fleshers and Masons. In the **Fleshers'** scene a stately procession of animals evokes a Roman sacrifice while at the right hand side you see the finished products on sale.
- In the last scene, the **Masons** are working in a flurry of activity laying bricks, winding a pulley and dropping a plumbline. At the right, three men pull an enormous block of stone with all their might.

To answer the question concerning the trade whose products feature in all the scenes, apart from that of the Weavers and Tailors, it was the Coopers.

Panels and Portraits

As part of his work of 1888, James Sellars panelled the lower walls of the Hall in mahogany with four ornate display boards to contain the names of past, present and future Deacon Conveners of the Trades.

Starting at the North end of the room, the first name appearing is that of Duncan Semphill, who was Deacon Convener in 1604. His trade, listed as Skipper, is not one found again on any of the panels, as the short-lived Incorporated Trade of Skippers and Mariners, disappears from the record shortly after 1605. Some of the names appear more than once: including the distinctively named Menasses Lyle or Ninian Gilhazie indicating either a thirst for office or difficulty in filling a demanding post, or perhaps a mixture of these two with other elements such as local politics.

There are twelve portraits around the walls. The earliest portraits are the first three which hang along the side of the room where the doors are. Here you can see what some of the Deacons from the early 1700s looked like. The fourth portrait along is of James Inglis, a Glasgow draper who sold clothes and fabric. In 1918, and again a decade later he gave substantial property to the Trades House for a new charitable fund, known as the Drapers' Fund used to benefit many disadvantaged children, youth groups and local children's charities. Next to his is Harry Lumsden, Clerk to the Trades House for over 40 years, magisterial editor of the Records of the Trades House down to 1777 and, with Henderson Aitken, the author of an authoritative history of the Hammermen. He was also Deacon Convener of the Trades of Irvine, an Ayrshire seaport often used by Glasgow merchants before the foundation of Port Glasgow.

The large portrait above the fireplace is of Archibald McLellan, who was Deacon Convener in 1831-32 and again in 1834. A member of the Incorporation of Hammermen, he was elected Deacon before he became twenty-one and was a city magistrate by the age of twenty-five. He left his collection of 16th and 17th century paintings to the City Council and they formed the basis of the city's collection, which the McLellan Galleries in Sauchiehall Street were built to house, in 1855.

Cross to the other end of the room to see the final portrait hanging between the windows. This is of John Dallas, Deacon Convener from 1924-26, who in 1924 established the Commonweal Fund, used to advance educational and charitable schemes, scientific study and research 'tending toward the commonweal' of Glasgow.

The large portrait on the wall adjacent to the entrance to the Saloon was painted by John Gilbert, RSA in 1826 and is of Deacon Convener William McTyre who was a member of the Cordiners and was Convener in 1823-24.

Now exit by the double doors to the landing at the top of the double stairs.

Deacon Convener's Suite

Next to the Library is the Deacon Convener's Suite, which comprises the Deacon Convener's room where visiting dignitaries to the Trades Hall are received. The room is oak panelled and houses many artefacts gifted to the House. The main feature of the room is the carpet, which displays the Coats of Arms of the fourteen Incorporations and the House. This was donated by the family of the Late Convener T. Kenneth Campbell in 1974/75. Also within the room is the Deacon Convener's Chest dating from 1761 and 2 pewter Alms dishes from the old Alms house that once stood at the Top of High Street beside the Cathedral

Adjacent to the Deacon Convener's room is the Deacon Convener's Lady's room, which is used as a reception room for lady visitors and also contains items gifted by Past Deacon Convener's to mark their year.

The Library

Moving from the first floor landing through the door opposite the Saloon and up the stairs there lies on the right the Trades House Library, which goes back to the days of the Trades Free School. The painting in this room is a copy in oils of the 'Four Philosophers' by Peter Paul Rubens and there is also a framed copy of the musical score of the 'Salute to Trades House'. The Library is often used for Master Court or other meetings and round the table are the chairs used by the Deacons and Visitor of the 14 crafts and by the Clerk of the House at Dinners and House meetings.

Each year the House donated a substantial sum for the maintenance and purchase for new books and in one year the scholars took out 1683 volumes. The existing library was remodeled by the then Chain Gang in 1994 to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Trades Hall with substantial collections being provided by the Old Glasgow Club and the Colquhoun Library from the Junior Chamber of Commerce. Books can be read by arrangement with the House Office, but they cannot be removed from the Library.

The Staircase

The main public staircase follows a typical Adam double staircase plan. Although the stair was rebuilt by James Sellars this is one of the few areas of the Trades Hall which retains original details, with some particularly fine plasterwork and an interesting tablet above the entrance to the Grand Hall which commemorates the opening of the building. Set in a circular panel is the Trades House' grant of Arms, very similar to Glasgow's, but with a red field as the lower part of its background.

The internal arched window with its two fluted columns supporting carved urns was the work of Glasgow Architect James Sellars. In 1888, Sellars was responsible for extending the building this side of the double doors and creating a rear entrance from Virginia Street. At the same time he rebuilt much of the original Adam staircase.

When he was aged twenty-nine Sellars visited France where he was greatly influenced by the late 16th century French style of Francois 1. Traces of this influence can be seen in the ornate moulded cornice, the urns and fluted columns of the stair window and inspired the glazed barrel-vaulted ceiling. The double height of the space, combined with the natural light from above and the delicate plasterwork create a light and airy feeling. The plasterwork panels just below the vault, feature sheaves of fourteen arrows which represent the fourteen Incorporated Trades and occur more frequently than the Arms of the Trades House throughout the building. Opposite the exit from the Grand Hall, a gilded inscription commemorates James Sellars' alterations of 1887-88, carried out under Deacon Convener James Tullis.

Stained Glass Window

The stained glass window giving on to the South Lightwell shows the old Arms of the Crafts as they appeared in 1888, when the Hall was remodelled by James Sellars. The background of each panel is made up of little painted icons; thistles, roses and harps, to symbolise Scotland, England and Ireland. The cost of installing the window was borne by James Tullis the Deacon Convener of the time. In the upper part of the window, the Trades House Arms appear again, with the inscription 'Instituted by Letter of Guildry 1605', flanked by two seated boys.

Sellars died in 1888, the same year that he finished work on this building, reputedly from gangrene in his foot which he injured on a building site. Although he lived for only forty-five years, he was responsible for many significant buildings in Glasgow, including what is now the Mitchell Theatre, Frasers in Buchanan Street and Kelvinside Academy.

There are two marble busts on the staircase. The gifting of such sculptures was a popular way of ensuring one's relatives would be remembered in times to come. Here you can see busts of William Maclean, who was Deacon Convener in 1827-28 and James McLennan, Deacon Convener in 1893-94.

The painting above the right hand bust is of George Crawford who was Clerk to the Trades House from 1831 to 1875. He is shown as a man of learning, holding pince-nez glasses in one hand and a letter in the other. His 'Sketch of the Trades House', though not in the same league as Lumsden's work, is still referred to for information to the present day.

The two portraits are of James Buchanan and his wife. James Buchanan rose from humble beginnings as a blacksmith in Glasgow's East End to amass a huge fortune trading with Jamaica in the early 1800s. On his death he left a legacy of £10,000, the equivalent of nearly half a million pounds in today's money, to pay for the education of Craftsmen's children.

Now go down the double staircase to the half-landing and, passing through the double doors, ascend to the top of the stone stair to reach the Craftsmen's Gallery. Those unable to climb so far may take the lift which also give access to the Saloon. Hanging from the roof of the stairway you will see a pair of magnificent chandeliers. These were a gift to the Trust from Mrs Marjorie Matheson, widow of Ex Convener James M Matheson and Late Preses of the Grand Antiquity Society of Glasgow.

Craftsmen's Gallery

The room that you are now in was originally added as an extension to the Trades Hall in 1808 as a purpose-built schoolroom, after Trades House decided to establish its own school, known as the Trades Free School. In 1808 sixty boys would take their places in this room, sitting on the oak benches which you see here.

An Act of Parliament some 150 years before had enacted the Knoxian ambition that every parish should have its own school, but as the population of Glasgow had grown in that time from 14,500 people to some 100,000, one school for each parish was clearly not enough.

Initially the Trades Free School was only for boys, the sons of freemen, but in 1838 girls were admitted. By 1844, 216 pupils attended the schools, half of them boys and half of them girls. During their four years here they were taught reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, church music and the principles of religion. A female teacher taught the girls needlework and knitting. The tapestry depicting the Finding of Moses was made by one of the pupils and won the Trades School prize.

More about the School

Bible stories and religious instruction were an important part of the curriculum. As well as attending classes through the week, pupils also came to school for two hours on Saturday mornings when religious instruction, history and geography were taught. Perhaps surprisingly, no science was taught, but particular attention was paid to spelling. Pupils sat four exams each year; those who failed to make the grade in spelling and reading were given extra tuition by the female teacher to bring them up to scratch. Literature was certainly considered important, and the school had its own library, housed in large bookcases in the schoolroom. The students were clearly avid readers, borrowing over 1,600 books during one session alone.

To help pay for staff costs, each of the Trades contributed 15 shillings a year towards each pupil it sent. However, the children had to provide their own books, paper, pens and ink. By 1839 the school had two male teachers who earned £100 per year, and one female teacher who, in the days before equal pay, earned only half that amount. On the wall you can see a portrait of Thomas Struther, who was Principal Teacher of the Trades Free School for twenty-one years, from 1845 to 1866.

Things changed with the introduction of the Education Act in 1872, which placed the responsibility for education in state control under the newly-created School Boards. It was now compulsory for all children under the age of thirteen to attend school. Individual enterprises like the Trades Free School provided many children with the opportunity to discover new worlds and perhaps even contributed to the next generation of Glasgow entrepreneurs. This room now contains a permanent exhibition on the history and work of the Trades House and the individual Incorporations who elect its members, as well as a brief section concerning the continuous development of the Trades Hall.

From here on Doors Open Days and like events, you can proceed towards the front of the building to the North and South Galleries, a reconstruction inspired by the original Adam designs of the two meeting rooms which originally flanked the upper part of the dome where it rose into the upper level of the Hall.

When you are ready to leave, go back to the top of the Stone stair and descend to the ground floor through the double doors, or take the lift to the ground level and turn left and then left again to reach the foot of the stairs at the end of the vestibule.

North and South Galleries

On the same floor as the Craftsmen's Gallery are the North and South Galleries. These have recently been fitted out with WIFI and all other necessary equipment to enable them to be hired out for meetings of up to thirty people.

Board Room

This is a small room across the corridor from the North Gallery which can accommodate meetings of six people.

Administration Office

The administration office is located at the top of the back stair and now accommodates all staff including the Catering Contractor. The office is open Monday-Friday 9 am till 1 pm and 2 pm to 5 pm.

The Reception Room

At the end of the corridor on the ground floor on the right is the main Reception Room, which used to form part of the former bank premises. This room having been brought back into use by the House is decorated simply in the modern style. It provides a useful space for receiving guests at functions or for exhibitions and as an all-purpose meeting room.

Entrance Vestibule

Although Robert Adam's original drawings of 1791 show the entrance hall with a cross-vaulted ceiling, his brothers James and William may have made alterations when completing the building after his death. The current ceiling probably dates from the 1930's, when this long, narrow passageway was reconstructed.

The floor is an intricate ceramic mosaic inset with the Arms of the Trades House crowned by the sheaf of fourteen arrows, representing the Incorporated Trades, with the motto 'Union is Strength'. The walls are panelled in oak, with painted decoration designed by Keppie in 1929.

The most noticeable items here are the carved oak benches which run the full length of the passageway, stretching over ten metres. They are believed to have been made by Belgian woodcarvers who were refugees in Glasgow during the First World War. There are actually two benches. The first is divided into four parts, separated by ornate arms each topped by a carved girl's head. The second bench consists of three parts. Each of the girls carries a different flower. In total there are thirty-four carved back panels, each displaying a different crest of which the first fourteen are those of the Incorporated Trades and others include the Merchants House and the University of Glasgow.

By contrast the second bench depicts the arms of different towns and cities. Those of Kirkcaldy sit next to Bruges, Mons and Liege, all Belgian towns, and may have been included as a reference to Robert Adam's birthplace.

Alexander Walker, a former Deacon of the Incorporation of Cordiners, gifted the benches to the Trades House in 1937.

Since the Trades Hall first opened its doors in 1794 it has operated as a public hall and it can be hired in whole or in part for a wide range of functions including conferences, meetings, dinners, dances, exhibitions and concerts. It is particularly popular for weddings.