

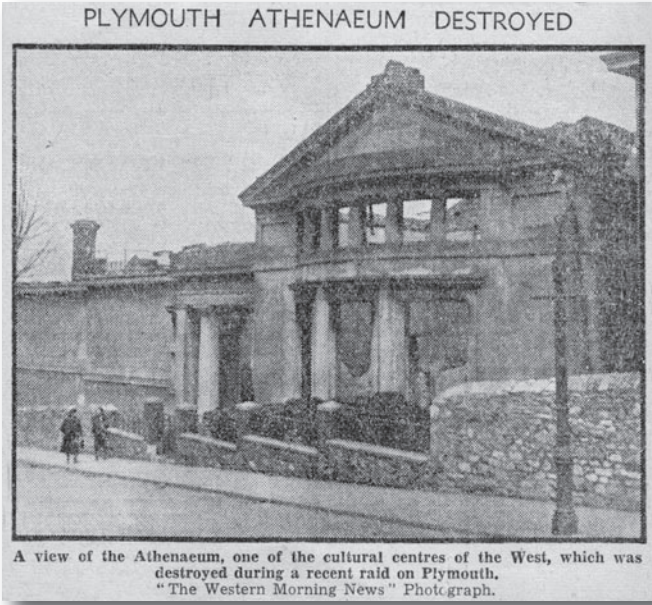
200 YEARS OF THE ATHENÆUM BUILDING

THE BLITZ

World War Two would have a devastating impact upon The Athenæum and change the organisation forever.

On 20th–21st March 1941, the biggest air raid in Plymouth of the War so far took place.

Damage to The Athenæum included the glass roof of the Scientific Library, leaving the room open to the sky.



The Western Morning News captures the damage of March-April 1941

through the floorboards in which it stood embedded, to be brought to a stop by the ground nearly two feet below.



Life goes on in George Street as The Athenæum shows the signs of the damage inflicted by the Luftwaffe

Visitors found a huge paving-stone, with about two feet of its length above the floor.

Carried from the street outside by the blast, it had crashed through the roof some 20 feet above.

In its slanting flight path, it went clean



105. The interior of the Athenaeum — its classical reliefs and adornments in tatters.

The devastation in the interior of The Athenæum

The tragic end for the original Athenæum came on the night of 21st–22nd April 1941, when the building and all its contents were destroyed.

A few incendiaries fell in the Lecture Hall, and when a whole canister was emptied on the building, it was soon a mass of flames, fanned by a keen east wind.

The water-mains having been severed at the beginning of the raid, there was no water available, and there was nothing to be done but to stand and watch the fire steadily consume the whole building.

It was impractical to salvage anything but a few items.



People watch as workmen make the building safe following the Luftwaffe raids of March and April 1941

RISING FROM THE ASHES

After many trials and tribulations with local and national authorities in the Post-War years, and failed plans for a new home, active examination of designs for the building the organisation occupies today began in December 1957.

The designs were prepared by architects Walls and Pearn and a plan for a building with a large lecture hall (1,800



Work was finally underway to rebuild The Athenæum in 1960

Institution's site in George Street for £13,700 and reimburse to the Institution various costs involved in the transactions.

And that the Corporation clear all structures and debris from the new site and provide vehicular access to and from the front portico of the new building.

In May 1959, the tender of Dudley Coles Ltd of £47,333 was accepted for the construction of the new building. However, financial and legal negotiations with the City Council delayed the signing of the building contract until December 1959, by which time the tender amount had to be increased.

Physical work on building the new Athenæum had only just got under way when, early in February 1960, *Westward Television* asked to see plans of the auditorium.

Within a fortnight, they suggested that modifications to the building should be made so that they could use it for television filming.

Additional items, part funded by the Institution and part by *Westward*, included a stage revolve, maple stage floor, a tunnel under the stage linked to the television studios and extra cabling and lighting.



Eventually, the opening ceremonies were rearranged to take place on the 1st June, 1961.

Although workmen were still in the Athenæum finishing the decoration up to the evening of 31st May, the opening ceremonies took place on schedule amidst great excitement, and the frustrations of the intervening 20 years were forgotten in the joy of the moment.

NEXT DISPLAY

THEATRE AND THE BEATLES

