

case study: historic value

The Signet Library Parliament Square, Edinburgh

The Society of Writers to Her Majesty's Signet, founded in 1594, is one of the oldest professional bodies in the world; yet, as the provider of education and accreditation support to Scotland's lawyers, it occupies a position at the leading edge of change in the 21st-century profession. The magnificent Signet Library in Parliament Square, owned and occupied by the Society, must meet the exacting requirements of its professional users while also 'earning its keep' as an entertainment venue.

Simon Laird Associates was asked to come up with a scheme for the east entrance hall of the Library, to resolve the conflicting requirements of:

- a businesslike reception facility for the Library and the Society's offices
- a quasi-ceremonial entrance to the Upper Library suitable for events and celebrations
- an effective security control for the Library and for this entrance to Parliament Hall

We proposed a process of consultation to establish the common threads shared by the different uses, followed by a pilot project, using temporary furniture, to try out different configurations for reception and security. It appears that the pilot project has been so successful that there are no immediate plans to replace the temporary furniture!

A parallel programme of upgrading the fittings and finishes is being implemented on a step-by-step basis as elements need to be replaced - the carpet, for example, was worn to the point of danger. We are relishing the challenge of expressing the Society's contemporary ethos in this historic interior, while ensuring that each step in the process sits comfortably with the sumptuous existing decoration.

We have now been engaged to advise on the ongoing maintenance and conservation of the building.

