

# History of The Breakfast Mission



RICHARD  
MURPHY  
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It is believed that the Architect of the Breakfast Mission was Robert Wilson (1834-1901). He was the son of Edinburgh architect Patrick Wilson. In 1871 he returned from London to take over his father's practice and within a few years secured the appointment of architect to the Edinburgh School Board. His early buildings were designed "in the quiet but distinctive London Gothic manner with attenuated details" (Dictionary of Scottish Architects). Wilson was a prominent Baptist and was for a time Vice-President of the Baptist Union of Scotland. He was interested in philanthropic movements and was the Director of the Free Breakfast Mission in Edinburgh. It is thought that he was both architect and client for the "Edinburgh Sabbath Free Breakfast Mission", which the title stone on Old Fishmarket Close dates as 1888. He was also associated with the Carrubers Close Mission, the Medical Mission and the Destitute Sick Society. The presence of so many missions in the Old Town at this time is a sure sign that the population was either destitute or of easy virtue or both. No records exist of the success or otherwise of the Breakfast Mission with their philosophy of a bowl of porridge in one hand and a Bible in the other.

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In the twentieth century the building passed into the ownership of the Church of Scotland who used it as a hostel for the homeless until they built purpose designed premises nearby on the Cowgate in 1991. After they vacated it was passed to the Church's housing association Castlerock who leased it to the Guilded Balloon Theatre Company who used it for Festival Performances and subleased it to a back-packing hostel company for the remainder of the year.

In 1998 Castlerock together with the development Company Buredi, the City of Edinburgh Council and the Council's own development company EDI entered into a complex land swap which resulted in a new nursery, private flats designed (by architectural competition) for Buredi on Old Fishmarket Close and new social housing for Castlerock on the Cowgate, both the latter two projects designed by Richard Murphy Architects. These two completed housing developments now bookend the Breakfast Mission building.

The Breakfast Mission sat in the middle of this development and the majority of it was purchased in 2000 by Richard Murphy to be converted into offices for his own practice and others with a small section being converted by his practice into four flats for Castlerock. The practice along with Engineers and Service Engineers moved in in 2001 after extensive internal remodelling constructed by Inscape Joinery. The three storey building had a fourth mezzanine level added in what had been the Mission Hall, two new separate but linked offices were made on the first floor and a garage and workshop and stores formed on the ground floor accessible from the rear, i.e. the radial road around Tron Square housing. A new staircase was constructed in the middle of the plan linking all four levels. For three years both office workers and housing tenants shared a common stair from Old Fishmarket Close but in 2004 with the completion of the apartments on Old Fishmarket Close, a new front door was made direct into what had been the main space on the second floor, the Mission Hall. This new door terminates the reconstructed close that was the main feature of the design of the new Buredi apartments next door and as a result the building now re-orientated itself towards the High Street. In the course of the alterations a sealed ground floor room was

opened and stone work representing the remains of previous buildings sitting on either side of the former Close was discovered (it had been incorporated into the Breakfast Mission walling) and this is now displayed at the foot of the new stair.

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