



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

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Milestone in historic hall revamp marked with musical twist

Musical instruments from the University of Edinburgh's world-class collection today (Thursday) heralded the half-way point in a £6.5million renovation of a historic venue.

The musical curiosities were played at a 'topping out' ceremony – traditionally held by construction workers – to celebrate progress in the restoration of St Cecilia's Hall, Scotland's oldest purpose-built concert hall.

Construction workers, University students, staff and project supporters gathered on site for a unique acoustic recital of a 19th century contrabass serpent, performed by musician Tony George.

The copper serpent played dates from around 1815 and was made in Glasgow. It is a descendent of the cornet and a distant ancestor of the tuba. The unusual instrument gets its name from its long cone, which is bent into a snake-like shape.

A 19th century ophicleide – an early predecessor of the tuba – was also played at the event.

St Cecilia's Hall is situated in the heart of Edinburgh's old town. Originally opened in 1763, it is known to have hosted some of Scotland's finest performances. The building has since had many uses, including a Baptist church, a school and a dance hall.

The Georgian venue is due to open to the public in spring 2017, when the University of Edinburgh's historic collection of musical instruments will be brought together for the first time to be displayed in St Cecilia's modernised gallery spaces.

The distinctive oval-shaped concert hall is also being restored and will hold concerts for audiences of up to 200 people.

Jacky MacBeath, Head of Museums at the University of Edinburgh, said: "The topping out ceremony was a wonderful opportunity to celebrate reaching a landmark moment in St Cecilia's Hall's renovation.

"The performance was a fitting tribute for the project and gave our students, partners and contractors the chance to experience some of the world's finest instruments that will be on public display in the near future."

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