



M027 Student design for a Public Hall

Introduction

Mackintosh's Grecian neo-classical competition design for a public hall won the 1890 Alexander Thomson Travelling Studentship awarded by the Glasgow Institute of Architects, and a silver medal in the Department of Science and Art National Competition in 1891.

Authorship: Drawings were published in the *British Architect* under Mackintosh's name. ¹

Status: Unbuilt

Chronology

1889

22 November: Competition announced in the *British Architect*. ¹

1890

30 August: Competition closing date. ²

4–20 September: Competition entries exhibited at the Corporation Galleries, Sauchiehall Street. ³

18 September: Meeting of the Alexander Thomson Memorial Trustees, who resolve to award the £60 Alexander Thomson Travelling Studentship to Mackintosh 'for the best set of drawings for a hall with side rooms'. The Studentship competition entries are exhibited at the Corporation Galleries. ⁴

21 and 28 November: Mackintosh's prize-winning drawings are published in the *British Architect*. ⁵

1891

3 March: Mackintosh's request for permission to enter his prize-winning drawings, by then property of the Alexander Thomson Memorial Trustees, in the annual Department of Science and Art National Competition at South Kensington is granted. ⁶

21 March: Mackintosh leaves Glasgow to travel in Italy, Belgium and France. ⁷

27 July: Exhibition of National Competition prize winners' work is announced. Mackintosh's designs for the Public Hall and Museum of Science and Art win him two silver medals. ⁸

Late July: Mackintosh returns to Glasgow.

20 August: Mackintosh's sketches, drawings and travel diary are presented at a meeting of the Alexander Thomson Memorial Trustees. ⁹

1892

6 September: Mackintosh presents a lecture on his tour of Italy to the Glasgow Architectural Association. ¹⁰

Description

This was Mackintosh's entry in the competition for the 1890 Alexander Thomson Travelling Studentship. Memorialising the great neo-classical Glasgow architect Alexander 'Greek' Thomson (1817–1875), the Studentship had been established by the Alexander Thomson Memorial Trustees in 1877. ¹

By Autumn 1886 efforts to improve architectural education were being made by the Glasgow Institute of Architects, under its chairman, the architect James Sellars, and by the Glasgow School of Art, under headmaster Francis H. ('Fra') Newbery. As a means of supporting their ambitions, the Thomson Trustees resolved to award the memorial prize for the 'furtherance of the study of ancient classic architecture as practised prior to the commencement of the third century of the Christian era'. The Studentship competition was to be 'open to every student in the United Kingdom'. The prize of approximately £75 would be awarded triennially beginning in 1887. ² The first winner was Glasgow architect William J. Anderson (1863–1900) who travelled to Italy in 1888. ³

The 1890 competition was announced in the *British Architect* on 22 November 1889. It was open to architectural students aged between 18 and 25 from across the United Kingdom, and the value of the Studentship was £60. The successful student was required 'within two years of intimation of his success, [to] go on a sketching tour to pursue architectural study'. Drawings completed during the tour would become the property of the Alexander Thomson Memorial

Trustees. The subject for the competition was 'an original design for a public hall for 1,000 persons (seated) with suitable committee-rooms, the design to be early classic and on an isolated site'. The closing date was 30 August 1890.⁴ The conditions further specified the type and number of drawings to be submitted, their scale, and the media for outlines and shading. Studies of sculptural ornament from a standing building or a cast were also to be submitted.⁵

Mackintosh was one of only five entrants. Three of his fellow competitors were Scottish: Robert James Gildard and George Smith Hill from Glasgow, and John Daniel Swanston from Dollar; the fourth was the London-based Ambrose Macdonald Poynter, who was elected at the time to the President of the Royal Institute of British Architects, George Aitchison.⁶ The competitors' designs were submitted anonymously for adjudication, Mackintosh's under the alias 'Griffin', the motif that can be seen on the drawings reproduced in the *British Architect*.⁷

When the Memorial Trustees met in September 1890 to select the winning design, Mackintosh emerged as winner by the narrowest of margins, securing just one more vote than Gildard. The result had been reached by a ballot after the Trustees' meeting had been adjourned without a decision.⁸

All of the Studentship competition entries, none of which survive, were exhibited at the Glasgow Corporation Galleries in Sauchiehall Street on 4–20 September 1890.⁹

Design

Mackintosh's design shows a monumental symmetrical building on two floors, raised on a high podium, with channelled rustication, and elevations of Ionic colonnades above, in three distinct sections. In the front range the modest main entrance, reached by carriage ramps, gives access to a single-storey, square entrance hall, with classrooms and committee rooms to either side and a 'lesser hall' on the first floor. In the rear range is a large, double-height hall with platform and gallery, its floor a half storey higher than the entrance hall and its long axis perpendicular to the entrance axis. Linking the two ranges is a double-height, square void containing the 'grand staircase', with a gallery landing on the first floor. The floors of the entrance hall, stairs and stair gallery are elaborately patterned.¹⁰

The unusual plan, with its three distinct parts, does not appear to have any obvious precedent. However the ceremonial route in Mackintosh's design, from the entrance passing the lesser rooms and grand staircase to the large hall may have been inspired by John Honeyman's 1882 addition to his own 1870 Greek Revival Paisley Library and Museum where a series of stairs punctuated by a rotunda extended up the steep site to connect the earlier library spaces with the new gallery areas.¹¹ The overall effect of the design is, as David Walker has observed, 'purely Sellars Grecian', 'with sculptural groups and lamp standards similar to those of Sellars' St Andrew's Hall', showing a clear debt to Thomson.¹²

For his entry to the competition bearing Thomson's name, it appears that Mackintosh did not simply make use of the prevailing stylistic conventions, but in an obvious yet astute move drew directly on some of Thomson's own work and sources. The podium and Ionic order recall the Caledonia Road Free Church (1855–7) and St Vincent Street Free Church (1857–9).¹³ In the composition of the entrance elevation there is more than a slight resemblance to Karl Friedrich Schinkel's Deutsches Theater (1818–21).

The neo-classical elements of the exterior however show the influence of the *École des Beaux-Arts* on architectural design and education in Glasgow. Mackintosh would have come into direct contact with this influence through John James Burnet, one of his teachers at Glasgow School of Art, and John Keppie; both had studied at the *École*.

In 1891, Mackintosh entered his design in the annual National Competition organised by the Department of Art and Science in South Kensington, London. The Department was responsible for the curriculum followed by art schools throughout Britain, a centralised scheme known as the 'South Kensington System'. The Department's annual National Competition displayed student work from art schools and classes across the country, attracting several thousand entries every year. Prize-winning entries were exhibited at the South Kensington Museum. In 1891, Mackintosh won two of the 74 silver medals awarded. One of these was presented for the public hall design and the second for his design for a Museum of Science and Art, which he had entered unsuccessfully in the British Institution Scholarship competition the previous year.¹⁴

Reception

The *British Architect* published Mackintosh's drawings over two consecutive issues in November 1890. It described his design as 'most creditable', and showing that 'the author has studied classic detail with care'.¹⁵

The following year the National Competition examiners described the design as having 'many good points, but the effect of larger features above smaller ones is disagreeable'.¹⁶ Reporting on prize-winning examples of architectural and decorative arts work at the National Competition exhibition, weekly journal *Building News* commented that Mackintosh's design 'has much Greek feeling, and is neatly drawn; a clever section is shown'.¹⁷

In 1896 an exhibition of National Competition gold and silver medal-winning 'art school drawings' since 1883 was held in London. It was reviewed in the *Builder*. Its critic was prompted to comment on the marked change to Renaissance style seen in the work of Glasgow architecture students since 1891, 'when Mr McIntosh was still following French and Glasgow-Greek models'.¹⁸

People

Clients:

- Glasgow Institute of Architects Alexander Thomson Memorial committee

Job Book

The job books of Honeyman & Keppie (later Honeyman, Keppie & Mackintosh) are now held by The Hunterian, University of Glasgow and include four volumes related to the Mackintosh period. The books were used by the firm to keep a project-by-project, day-by-day record of contractors, suppliers and expenditure. The name of a project and/or client is usually at the top of the left-hand page, followed by information about tradesmen who tendered. The name of the measurer (quantity surveyor) is usually at the top of the right-hand page, followed by information about payments to contractors and suppliers. All of the data for M027 is entered in the tables below.

Page numbering is not consistent in the job books. Sometimes a single number refers to a double-page spread and sometimes each page is individually numbered. Here, each image of a double-page spread is identified by the number given at the top of the left-hand page. (Images of all of the pages from the four job books can be found at [Browse Job Books, Visit Book and Cash Book.](#))

The following information about M027 has been extracted from the job books:

Documents

Bibliography

Published

- Pamela Robertson, 'Mackintosh and Italy', in Pamela Robertson, ed., *Charles Rennie Mackintosh: The Architectural Papers*, Wendlebury, Oxon: White Cockade in association with the Hunterian Art Gallery, 1990, pp. 65–88
- David Walker, 'Mackintosh on Architecture', in Pamela Robertson, ed., *Charles Rennie Mackintosh: The Architectural Papers*, Wendlebury, Oxon: White Cockade in association with the Hunterian Art Gallery, 1990, p. 153
- David Walker, 'The Glasgow Years', in Wendy Kaplan, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh*, New York and London: Abbeville Press, 1996, p. 123
- *British Architect*, 7, 16 February 1877, p. 107; 34, 26 September 1890, p. 223; 34, 21 November 1890, pp. 381, 386–7; 34, 28 November 1890, pp. 402, 405–6
- *Glasgow Herald*, 27 July 1891, p. 8; 24 August 1891, p. 8

Unpublished

- Glasgow Institute of Architects archive: Alexander Thomson Memorial minutes.
- Hiroaki Kimura, 'Charles Rennie Mackintosh: Architectural Drawings', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 1982, pp. 19, 73–4

Notes:

1: *British Architect*, 34, 21 November 1890, pp. 381, 386–7; 28 November 1890, p. 402; pp. 405–6.

2: *British Architect*, 32, 22 November 1889, p. 359.

3: *British Architect*, 32, 22 November 1889, p. 359.

4: Glasgow Institute of Architects archive: Alexander Thomson Memorial minutes, 3 September 1890.

5: Date of award recorded on receipts of the two payments of £30 to Mackintosh. The Hunterian: University of Glasgow: Alexander Thomson Travelling Studentship correspondence, receipt for first payment of £30, 27 February 1891 (on loan from the Glasgow Institute of Architects); Glasgow Institute of Architects archive: Alexander Thomson Memorial minutes, 11 September 1890; 18 September 1890. The Trustees were John Gordon (president of Glasgow Institute of Architects), James Chalmers, Alexander Petrie, William F. Salmon, Alexander Skirving, Malcolm Stark, Thomas L. Watson and John Shields (Secretary).

6: *British Architect*, 34, 21 November 1890, pp. 381, 386–7; 28 November 1890, pp. 402, 405–6.

7: The Hunterian: University of Glasgow, Alexander Thomson Travelling Studentship correspondence, letters between Mackintosh and John Shields, undated and 3 March 1891 (on loan from the Glasgow Institute of Architects).

8: The trip is recorded in two sketchbooks, and a group of dismembered sketchbook pages and independent watercolours. See his diary and lecture, Pamela Robertson, 'Mackintosh and Italy' in Pamela Robertson, ed., *Charles Rennie Mackintosh: The Architectural Papers*, Wendlebury, Oxon: White Cockade in association with the Hunterian Art Gallery, 1990pp. 64–125; Elaine Grogan, *Beginnings: Charles Rennie Mackintosh's Early Sketches*, Oxford: Architectural Press in association with the National Library of Ireland, 2002, pp. 47–136; Mackintosh's North Italian sketchbook, www.mackintoshsketchbook.net [accessed 30 January 2012].

9: *Glasgow Herald*, 27 July 1891, p. 8; Mackintosh was also awarded two 'third or highest grade prizes' for further work. It is not known what this work comprised. *Glasgow Herald*, 24 August 1891, p. 8.

10: The Hunterian: University of Glasgow, Alexander Thomson Travelling Studentship letters, correspondence between Mackintosh and John Shields, 12 and 13 August 1891 (on loan from the Glasgow Institute of Architects).

- 11:** *British Architect*, 38, 9 September 1892, p. 198; Pamela Robertson, ed., *Charles Rennie Mackintosh: The Architectural Papers*, Wendlebury, Oxon: White Cockade in association with the Hunterian Art Gallery, 1990, pp. 108–125.
- 12:** *British Architect*, 7, 16 February 1877, p. 107.
- 13:** 'Glasgow Institute of Architects', *Glasgow Herald*, 20 October 1886, p. 9.
- 14:** 'William James Anderson', *Dictionary of Scottish Architects, 1840–1980*, www.scottisharchitects.org.uk [accessed 26 March 2012].
- 15:** *British Architect*, 32, 22 November 1889, p. 359; 34, 21 November 1890, p. 381. The prize was paid in two instalments: the first £30 on the the satisfactory arrangement of the tour; the second sum after three months when 'the student has presented satisfactory evidence of his diligence in the form of sketches and drawings, and a manuscript memoir descriptive of his tour'.
- 16:** Glasgow Institute of Architects archive: Alexander Thomson Memorial minutes, 7 November 1889. Competition conditions are written out in the minute book pp. 116–19.
- 17:** Glasgow Institute of Architects archive: Alexander Thomson Memorial minutes 11 September 1890; 18 September 1890.
- 18:** 'Griffin' was also the alias used by Mackintosh for the 1892 Royal Institute of British Architects Soane Medaillon competition for which he designed a Chapter House.
- 19:** Glasgow Institute of Architects archive: Alexander Thomson Memorial minutes 11 September 1890; 18 September 1890.
- 20:** Glasgow Institute of Architects archive: Alexander Thomson Memorial minutes, 3 September 1890.
- 21:** Mackintosh's perspective, front elevation, ground- and first-floor plans and cross and longitudinal sections were reproduced in *British Architect*, 34, 21 November 1890, pp. 381, 386–7; 28 November 1890, pp. 402, 405–6.
- 22:** 'Paisley Museum, Art Galleries, and Library', Paisley: Renfrewshire Council Department of Planning and Transport, 1996; Paisley Library and Museum was extended for a second time by Honeyman, Keppie & Mackintosh in 1902–4 to provide additional reading rooms.
- 23:** David Walker, 'Mackintosh on Architecture', in Pamela Robertson, ed., *Charles Rennie Mackintosh: The Architectural Papers*, Wendlebury, Oxon: White Cockade in association with the Hunterian Art Gallery, 1990, p. 153; David Walker, 'The Glasgow Years', in Wendy Kaplan, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh*, New York and London: Abbeville Press, 1996, p. 123; 'John James Burnet'; 'James Sellars', *Dictionary of Scottish Architects, 1840–1980*, www.scottisharchitects.org.uk [accessed 14 March 2012].
- 24:** 'Alexander Thomson', *Dictionary of Scottish Architects, 1840–1980*, www.scottisharchitects.org.uk [accessed 26 March 2012]; Pamela Robertson, 'Mackintosh and Italy', in Pamela Robertson, ed., *Charles Rennie Mackintosh: The Architectural Papers*, Wendlebury, Oxon: White Cockade in association with the Hunterian Art Gallery, 1990, p. 65.
- 25:** Mackintosh's friend, the artist John Quinton Pringle, was awarded one of only six gold medals presented in 1891 for his 'chalk drawings of figures from the nude'. *Glasgow Herald*, 27 July 1891, p. 8.
- 26:** *British Architect*, 34, 21 November 1890, p. 381.
- 27:** Glasgow School of Art archive: Glasgow School of Art annual report 1890–1, GSAA/GOV/1, p. 13; *Glasgow Herald*, 27 July 1891, p. 8.
- 28:** *Building News*, 61, 31 July 1891, p. 136.
- 29:** *Builder*, 71, 26 December 1896, pp. 596–7.

Mackintosh Architecture: Context, Making and Meaning

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