

M073 Competitive design for Manchester Municipal Technical School

Introduction

This was John Honeyman & Keppie's unsuccessful entry in the important 1892 architectural competition for a new technical school in Manchester. The Italian Renaissance-style building, of five principal storeys plus basement, was intended for teaching subjects such as Engineering, Chemistry and Printing.

Authorship: It is not clear who within the practice was responsible for the design, and it may well have been a joint effort. Some features, such as the arched windows, seem to be due to John Keppie; others, such as the Italian-influenced square tower, suggest Mackintosh's involvement.

Alternative addresses: Granby Row Rifle Street Whitworth Street

Status: Unbuilt

Grid reference: SJ 84483 97714

Chronology

1892

May: Architectural competition announced. ¹

2 August: Deadline for submissions. ²

22 August: Alfred Waterhouse begins assessing entries. ³

September: Spalding & Cross confirmed as winners. ⁴

28 October and 4 November: John Honeyman & Keppie's unsuccessful design published in the *British Architect*. ⁵

1893

February: John Honeyman & Keppie's design exhibited at the Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts (799).

1894

John Honeyman & Keppie's design exhibited at the Royal Scottish Academy (514).

Description

Background

The Manchester Technical School grew directly out of the Manchester Mechanics' Institute, established in 1824 for the education of artisans. As a result of the Technical Instruction Act of 1889, which gave councils the power to fund technical education from the rates, the School became the responsibility of Manchester Corporation on 31 March 1892. ¹

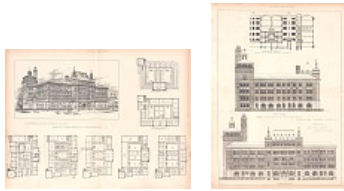
Competition

The erection of a new building had already been decided upon before the municipal takeover, and an architectural competition was announced in May 1892. ² The new building had to provide offices, classrooms, workshops and laboratories for 13 self-contained departments: Administration; Mechanical Engineering; Applied Physics and Electrical Engineering; Textile Trades; Applied Chemistry; Dyeing and Finishing; Brewing; Metallurgy; Building Trades; Letterpress and Lithographic Printing; Industrial Design; Commercial Subjects; and what was referred to as 'Women's Work'. Other requirements included 'one main entrance with spacious vestibule leading to a hall for the exhibition of models and other objects, and a staircase leading therefrom to a large hall above, to accommodate 900 persons'. ³ The large floor space required by the departments, and the relatively confined city-centre site, meant that a building of five or six storeys was necessary. The cost was not to exceed £75,000. ⁴ Reviewing the outcome of the competition, the *Building News* recognised the challenge posed by the conditions:

These various requirements left little room for architectural display, and the elevations submitted with most of the designs show that the competitors had enough to tax their resources in the plan, which left them very little scope for architectural disposition ... In fact, a technical school on a limited site is certainly not a

very promising building for the architect's imagination, or one that is suggestive of artistic possibilities. *Building News*, 63, 16 September 1892, p. 377. An assessor had not yet been selected when the competition was announced,⁶ but Alfred Waterhouse was ultimately appointed. He began judging the 26 entries on 22 August 1892, and in early September the council confirmed his award of first place to Spalding & Cross of London.⁷ The three runners up were Gibson & Russell of London, Ernest Runtz & F. R. Farrow of London and Theodore Sington of Manchester. The contest was clearly a high-profile one, with the recent Act holding out the likelihood of more such buildings, and Manchester's being a major example of the type.⁸

The *Building News* and *British Architect* both published the four premiated designs, and the *British Architect* went on to publish John Honeyman & Keppie's unsuccessful design as well, thus providing the only record of it.⁹ All the published designs were Renaissance or classical in style, and it seems that the terms of the competition explicitly excluded Gothic.¹⁰



As the *British Architect* noted, Waterhouse did not write a report of his adjudication, so the reasoning behind it can only be guessed at.¹¹ To judge from the published perspectives, John Honeyman & Keppie's design was externally more impressive than its successful rivals, but this may have caused it to exceed the budget. The square, machicolated tower with its pyramid roof is striking, but according to the plans it contains no functional space on its topmost floors, and to a cost-conscious committee it would have seemed superfluous. The same might be said of the 'Ambulatory', a spacious, glazed corridor at roof level, looking down into the two central light wells. This curious feature looks forward to Mackintosh's much later loggia and 'hen run' at the Glasgow School of Art.

The elevational treatment – pairs of two-light early Venetian Renaissance windows on the first floor, with two storeys of mullioned-and-transomed French Renaissance windows above – is very closely based on Robert Rowand Anderson's Central Hotel of 1882–4 in Gordon Street, Glasgow.¹²



The extent of Mackintosh's involvement in the design is unclear. Presumably John Keppie, as partner, would not have left such a large and complex project to his young assistant alone, but it is not easy to disentangle their respective contributions. Features that may be due to Keppie include the large round-arched ground-floor windows, which seem to derive from the work of his former employer, James Sellars (similar windows occur at the Glasgow Herald buildings and at the Skin and Hide Market in Greendyke Street). A feature that strongly suggests Mackintosh's involvement is the tower, which appears to be based on the 14th-century Castello Estense at Ferrara, sketched by him during his Italian tour the previous year.¹³ Another is the branching staircase rising to first-floor level in the double-height central hall, which echoes a similar stair in his student design for a Science and Art Museum.



The frieze of figures above the main entrance may show the influence of Hamo Thornycroft's recent frieze on John Belcher's Institute of Chartered Accountants in London, which was widely imitated on late 19th- and early 20th-century buildings throughout Britain. It appears again in John Honeyman & Keppie's unsuccessful competition design of 1895 for the Paisley Technical School.



Critical reception

The competition designs were exhibited in the Municipal School of Art in Cavendish Street, Manchester, where they were reviewed by the *Building News*.¹⁴ The review mentions several of the unpremiated designs, but they were exhibited anonymously, identified only by letters, and John Honeyman & Keppie's is not recognisable from the brief published descriptions. The *British Architect* considered their design to be 'very near being the best in the whole series submitted', and thought it would have been 'very instructive to those interested in the competition to have had Mr Waterhouse's views as to the points of failure and merit in such an excellent design.'¹⁵ The following year, John Honeyman & Keppie showed one of the elevations at the Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts (799), where the *Glasgow Herald* judged it 'perhaps the best exterior design submitted for this important work'.¹⁶ In 1894 their design appeared again, at the Royal Scottish Academy (514).

Images



Institute of Chartered Accountants, London: detail showing frieze



Central Hotel, Gordon Street, Glasgow, by Robert Rowand Anderson, 1882-4

Bibliography

Published

- J. M. Richards and Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Anti-Rationalists*, London: Architectural Press, 1973, pp. 119–120
- David Walker, 'The Glasgow Years', in Wendy Kaplan, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh*, New York and London: Abbeville Press, 1996, p. 128
- *British Architect*, 38, 28 October 1892, p. 314; 4 November 1892, p. 332
- *Glasgow Herald*, 18 February 1893, p. 4

Unpublished

- Hiroaki Kimura, 'Charles Rennie Mackintosh: Architectural Drawings', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 1982, pp. 21–2

Notes:

- 1: *British Architect*, 37, 20 May 1892, p. 369.
- 2: *British Architect*, 37, 20 May 1892, p. 369.
- 3: *Builder*, 63, 3 September 1892, p. 191.
- 4: *Builder*, 63, 10 September 1892, p. 206.
- 5: *British Architect*, 38, 28 October 1892, p. 314; 4 November 1892, p. 332.
- 6: P. J. Short, 'The Municipal School of Technology and the University, 1890–1914', in D. S. L. Cardwell, ed., *Artisan to Graduate: Essays to Commemorate the Foundation in 1824 of the Manchester Mechanics' Institution, now in 1974 the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1974, pp. 157–64.
- 7: P. J. Short, 'The Municipal School of Technology and the University, 1890–1914', in D. Cardwell, ed., *Artisan to Graduate: Essays to Commemorate the Foundation in 1824 of the Manchester Mechanics' Institution, now in 1974 the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1974, pp. 157–64; *British Architect*, 37, 20 May 1892, p. 369.
- 8: *Building News*, 63, 16 September 1892, p. 377.
- 9: *Building News*, 63, 16 September 1892, p. 377.
- 10: *Building News*, 63, 16 September 1892, p. 377.
- 11: *British Architect*, 37, 20 May 1892, p. 369.
- 12: *Builder*, 63, 3 September 1892, p. 191; 10 September 1892, p. 206.
- 13: The subject for the Royal Institute of British Architects' 1891 Soane Medallion competition was a Technical College: *Journal of Proceedings of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, 7, 22 January 1891, p. 134.
- 14: *Building News*, 63, 23 September 1892, p. 421; 30 September 1892, p. 455; 7 October 1892, p. 489; *British Architect*, 38, 30 September 1892, p. 242; 7 October 1892, p. 260; 14 October 1892, p. 278; 21 October 1892, p. 296; 28 October 1892, p. 314; 4 November 1892, p. 332.
- 15: *Building News*, 63, 16 September 1892, p. 378.
- 16: *British Architect*, 38, 7 October 1892, pp. 256–7.
- 17: This was first noted by David Walker, in J. M. Richards and Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Anti-Rationalists*, London: Architectural Press, 1973, pp. 119–20.

18: Dublin, National Library of Ireland: Mackintosh sketchbook, PD 2009 TX, p. 83.

19: *Building News*, 63, 16 September 1892, p. 377–8.

20: *British Architect*, 38, 28 October 1892, p. 314; 4 November 1892, p. 332.

21: *Glasgow Herald*, 18 February 1893, p. 4.

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