

M105 Martyrs Public School

Introduction

This three-storey former board school in the Townhead district of Glasgow is symmetrically planned around a central light well. It is a relatively plain building inside and out, with a limited amount of carved ornament derived from 17th-century Scottish architecture. Inside, the design of the exposed roof timbers above the central hall, and especially above the stairs, is highly unusual. The school was converted to museum use in the 1990s.

Authorship: Martyrs Public School is one of an important group of buildings by John Honeyman & Keppie dating from the mid 1890s – others are the Glasgow Herald buildings and Queen's Cross Church – in which Mackintosh's distinctive contribution to the work of the firm can first be clearly seen. The design includes some strikingly unorthodox features, particularly the roof timbers, which suggest that Mackintosh took a leading role in the project. His handwriting appears extensively on the drawings approved by the Glasgow Dean of Guild Court, and he made an elaborate perspective drawing of the school, which was exhibited and reproduced in the architectural press.

Alternative names: St Mungo's Academy annexe; College of Building annexe.

Alternative addresses: 11 Barony Street

Cost from job book: £9565 12s 8d

Cost from other sources: £9630 ¹

Status: Standing building

Current use: Glasgow City Council offices (2014)

Listing category: A

Historic Scotland/HB Number: 32619

RCAHMS Site Number: NS66NW 111

Grid reference: NS 60081 65840

Chronology

1895

18 January 1895: John Honeyman & Keppie appointed architects for new school. ¹

11 July 1895: Plans approved by Glasgow Dean of Guild Court. ²

1 November 1895: Work commences on site. ³

1897

2 August: New school opens, though building work still in progress. ⁴

1898

25 January: Building is 'nearing completion'. ⁵

5 May: Discharged by Glasgow Dean of Guild Court. ⁶

1973–4

School threatened with demolition for proposed motorway interchange, having become redundant in 1973. ⁷

1984

Proposals put forward by the Forum Arts Society Trust for conversion to 'a forum for the Arts, offering a centre for participation and experience along with appropriate social facilities'. Design for conversion prepared by Assist Architects. ⁸

1985

Roadworks underway for Townhead interchange, involving construction of new road across site of playground. ⁹

1986

13 May: Emergency meeting organised by Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society with representatives of Forum Arts Society Trust, Historic Buildings Council, Glasgow District Council and Strathclyde Regional Council. Ongoing deterioration of the fabric is discussed, and all parties agree that conversion of the building 'should and could go ahead at once'. ¹⁰

1987

Summer: Phase I of refurbishment programme, costing c. £430,000, is proceeding and scheduled for completion at the end of October. ¹¹ Work appears to be limited to the exterior. ¹²

1993

Disused. ¹³

1996

June: Commencement of conversion into a conservation centre for Glasgow Museums by James Cuning, Young & Partners. ¹⁴

1998

Competition for redesign of Parson Street, won by RMJM Scotland Ltd. ¹⁵

Description

Origins and setting

John Honeyman & Keppie's building replaced an earlier Martyrs School situated just to the S., built c. 1859 for the Rev. Norman Macleod (1812–72), minister of the Barony Parish and a great educator. ¹ The name commemorates the Church of Scotland Covenanters executed for their beliefs at the Townhead in 1684. With accommodation for only 472 pupils, the old school had become overcrowded by 1895. The new school occupies the site of its playground, and is entered from the S. side of Parson Street (where, coincidentally, Mackintosh was born in 1868). Its setting was radically transformed in the second half of the 20th century, first by the demolition of tenements in the surrounding streets, then by major excavations in the 1980s for an access road to the M8 motorway. This new road obliterated Barony Street, which had defined the E. side of the site, and removed most of the school's playground.

Commission

John Honeyman & Keppie were already engaged on a large addition to Dovehill School for The School Board of Glasgow when they were awarded the Martyrs commission. As with the later Scotland Street Public School, they appear to have been appointed without taking part in any competition. They were notified in January 1895 that they were to design 'a new school in Barony Street to accommodate say from 900 to 1000 scholars', their fee being 3% of the overall cost. ² The tendering process and the appointment of contractors seem to have been handled by the School Board, the architects simply being informed of the Board's decisions. ³

Exterior

Unlike Scotland Street with its spine corridors, Martyrs has a centralised plan more typical of Glasgow Board schools. The hall surrounded by classrooms on all four sides results in a squarish, compact building. W., S. and E. wings form a U-shaped block, but the N. wing is distinct, shorter than the S. wing, and with its own hipped roof. Projecting slightly in the angles between it and the W. and E. wings are separate staircases for girls and boys, each with its own entrance. A third entrance for infants and girls is in the centre of the S. side. The stairs are distinguished by big, round-arched, mullioned-and-transomed windows at second-floor level, and by roofs with deep eaves on elongated, close-set timber brackets, separated from the adjoining classroom roofs by shallow strips of coping. These contrast with the cornices of the classroom blocks, and look forward to the similar eaves on the N. front of the Glasgow School of Art. With their asymmetrically arranged windows, the W. and E. elevations look disjointed, but this would have been less disturbing before the demolition of neighbouring buildings opened up views that were unintended by the architects.



The 1906 rules of the Scotch Education Department specified that the cills of classroom windows should be no more than four feet above the floor. ⁴ At Martyrs, however, some ten years earlier, the classroom windows are not only too high for a child to see out, but also above the eye-level of most adults. From the outside, the difference between the high cills in the classrooms and the much lower cills in the teachers' rooms is conspicuous. A small number of classroom windows on the W. side have lower cills, presumably because neighbouring buildings, since demolished, made the view from here less distracting. Most of the windows are multi-pane sashes, but those on the stairs have small square leaded lights.

This is a relatively plain building, in keeping with the budgetary constraints of the School Board of Glasgow. The external walls of red Ballochmyle freestone are snecked and stugged, with smooth ashlar dressings. Some decorative details are mildly baroque, such as the banded architraves which frame many of the windows, and the curved pediments above the second-floor windows on the N. front. The distinctive lintels above the girls' and boys' entrances resemble the

top-floor windows of John Honeyman & Keppie's near-contemporary Glasgow Herald buildings in Mitchell Street, and the first-floor windows of Queen Margaret's College Anatomical Department, buildings which can be largely ascribed to Mackintosh. Their sinuous mouldings seem to be adapted from such late-medieval or 17th-century examples as the flattened ogee doorway of the 1636 Skelmorlie Aisle at Largs, Ayrshire, sketched by Mackintosh in May 1890.⁵



Other details derived from Scottish medieval and Renaissance sources are the relieving arches above many of the windows, the mullioned two-light openings that ventilate the basement, and the chunky, widely-spaced balusters of the boundary wall. W. S. Moyes, a contemporary of Mackintosh in John Honeyman & Keppie's office, thought the balusters might have been influenced by Stirling Castle, but a closer parallel is with the balustrade of 17th-century Cowane's Hospital in Stirling, of which Mackintosh made a sketch.⁶ Another possible source is the Lion and Unicorn stair of 1690 from the Old College in Glasgow's High Street, not far from Martyrs, which was relocated to Glasgow University's new building at Gilmorehill in 1872.



Besides these historically derived details there are a number of more idiosyncratic features: the enormously elongated consoles flanking the doors, ending in bulbous, lobed shapes; the concave ends of some of the deep, bracketed window cills that die into the surrounding masonry; the highly distinctive top of the square boiler flue, with brackets projecting diagonally at the angles (some now broken); and the domed *tempietti* that enclose the roof-top ventilators.



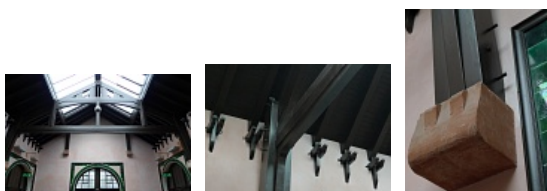
Interior

Despite conversion from their original use, the main interior spaces are essentially unaltered. The plan is symmetrical about the top-lit central hall, which rises through all three storeys, surrounded by balustraded landings. What were originally ground-floor classrooms open directly off the hall, those on the upper floors off the landings. Former cloakrooms and lavatories (for hand-washing) adjoin the infants' entrance and the bottom of both stairs. On each floor, what was originally a teachers' room opens directly off the stairs, divided from the landing by a lobby and a round-arched, glazed screen.



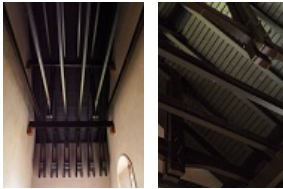
Much of the basement was given over to the heating system, the location of the furnace room in the S.E. corner being indicated externally by the tall, square chimney. According to the architects' drawings, air was warmed by 'heating coils', then distributed by an 'air propeller' through a series of ducts embedded in the walls, with outlets in each room. The drawings show a 'Kitchen' in the S.W. corner of the basement. This was presumably the room referred to by John Honeyman & Keppie when they reported to the School Board on 20 January 1896 that 'the cookery room, with stair down to same and retaining wall are now completed'.⁷

The most distinctive features of the interior are the open timber roofs over the two staircases and the central hall. The trusses of the hall roof rest on oddly shaped corbels, and their central uprights have curious lobed swellings near the top – similar to the consoles on either side of the girls' and boys' entrances. Where the rafters meet the wall, they appear to rest on pairs of brackets, which read as the ends of beams projecting through the wall from the neighbouring classrooms and stairwells. In fact, the brackets have no structural significance and are purely ornamental, as was revealed when the plaster was stripped from the wall during repairs c. 1992.⁸ These brackets, and the use of pegs both here and on the trusses, carry echoes of traditional Japanese timber construction.



The closely-spaced trusses over the stairs are even more unusual, forming a cat's cradle of long, thin timbers in which it is again unclear if the various elements are performing a mechanical or an aesthetic function. Here, the upright members are pairs of thin, flat timbers, clasp the tie beams to which they are attached

by wooden pegs, and extending below them, where they are pierced by inverted heart motifs.



The complex illusionism of the hall roof timbers contrasts with the frank use of steel beams to support the floors. Structural steelwork is used throughout, but is seen most clearly around the central light well, where the concrete landings are carried on large I-beams, bolted together at the corners, with smaller I-beams laid on top at right angles. Prominent T-beams carry the stone stairs.



The internal brick walls are plastered and tiled to dado height on the stairs and landings. The tiling is mostly cream, with a green border. The light-well railings at first- and second-floor level are buttressed by elegant swan-neck supports in the form of elongated wrought-iron leaves. Attached to the I-beams at their bases, they swell out into the light well before curving in again to join the railings just below the handrail.

Critical reception

Mackintosh's perspective drawing was exhibited at the Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts in 1896 (325), and illustrated in the *Building News* and *Academy Architecture*, along with a ground-floor plan.⁹ The perspective emphasises the building's Scottish historical character – the snecked masonry, the relieving arches, the wall-mounted sundial (which, however, does not appear to have existed) – even placing it in a spurious 17th-century setting, next to a house with a round stair tower and a lintel dated 1653. The art critic of the *Glasgow Herald* thought the drawing 'very mannered', and dismissed the school as 'having little pretension to architectural effect', but thought it 'quite suitable for its purpose.'¹⁰ The *Builder* reproduced the drawing again in 1898, and described the school more sympathetically as 'an effective and characteristic group by Messrs Honeyman & Keppie'.¹¹

Later history

Martyrs was given statutory protection as a listed building in December 1970. The threat of demolition in 1973–4, for a road scheme, galvanised opposition, not least from the newly-founded Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society, a pressure group established to raise awareness of the Mackintosh legacy and campaign for its preservation.¹² A long-awaited external refurbishment was undertaken c. 1987, and in 1996 work began on converting the building into a conservation centre for Glasgow Museums.¹³

People

Clients:

- The School Board of Glasgow

Contractors:

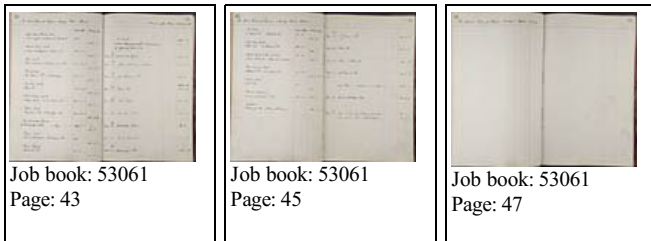
- John Anderson
- John Baxter
- J. G. Carrick & Co.
- Alex. Davie & Co.
- Elder & Co.
- William Forbes
- Hamilton & Co.
- Helliwell & Co.
- Hunter, McWilliam & Co.
- Isaac Law
- McGeoch & Co.
- C. & J. Malloch
- Andrew Meiklejohn
- John Paterson & Co.
- A. & J. Scott
- Shirra & Black
- W. & A. Taylor
- W. G. Walker & Sons
- J. Youden & Co.

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 M105 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 M105 has been extracted from the job books:



Client: The School Board of Glasgow

Measurer: John Baxter

Measurer address: St Vincent Street

Tenders:

Contractor	Type	Address	Date	Value	Accepted
W. & A. Taylor	digger mason & brickwork	142 Barloch Street, Possilpark	no data in job book	£5025 4s 0d ¹	yes
Andrew Meiklejohn	carpenter & joiner	21 Rupert Street	no data in job book	£2185 16s 11d ²	yes
John Anderson	slater	362 Parliamentary Road	no data in job book	£160 16s 9d ³	yes
John Paterson & Co.	plumber	40 Candleriggs	no data in job book	£447 1s 3d ⁴	yes
Isaac Law	gasfitter	no data in job book	no data in job book	£162 12s 7d ⁵	yes
William Forbes	lath & plaster	167 West Graham Street	no data in job book	£296 5s 5d ⁶	yes
Hamilton & Co.	paviour	10 Margaret Street	no data in job book	£284 19s 7d ⁷	yes
W. G. Walker & Sons	tarmacadam paving	Ayr	no data in job book	£142 7s 0d ⁸	yes
C. & J. Malloch	glazier	St Vincent Street	no data in job book	£109 2s 6d ⁹	yes
Helliwell & Co.	patent glazing	no data in job book	no data in job book	£23 2s 6d ¹⁰	yes
J. Youden & Co.	tiling	Bothwell Street	no data in job book	£291 12s 0d ¹¹	yes
Elder & Co.	steel & iron	50 Galbraith Street	no data in job book	£235 5s 1d ¹²	yes
Shirra & Black	smith work and stair railing	6 Blair Street, Anderston	no data in job book	£76 2s 0d ¹³	yes
McGeoch & Co.	ironmongery	108 Argyle Street	no data in job book	£118 3s 10d ¹⁴	yes
A. & J. Scott	painter	no data in job book	no data in job book	£148 0s 0d ¹⁵	yes

Hunter, McWilliam & Co.	heating apparatus	no data in job book	no data in job book	£198 10s 0d ¹⁶	yes
J. G. Carrick & Co.	ventilators	no data in job book	no data in job book	£28 0s 0d ¹⁷	yes

Payments (trades):

Name	Type	Payment out sum
W. & A. Taylor	digger mason & brickwork	£4867 6s 7d ¹⁸
Andrew Meiklejohn	carpenter & joiner	Payment date: 10 February 1899 £2148 10s 8d
John Anderson	slater	Payment date: 9 September 1897 £116 5s 3d
John Paterson & Co.	plumber	Payment date: 12 September 1898 £467 15s 0d
Isaac Law	gasfitter	Payment date: 1 September 1898 £116 6s 4d
William Forbes	lath & plaster	Payment date: 29 March 1898 £284 18s 9d
Hamilton & Co.	pavior	Payment date: 29 March [1898] £236 2s 9d
W. G. Walker & Sons	tarmacadam paving	Payment date: 25 February 1898 £76 2s 0d
C. & J. Malloch	glazier	Payment date: 15 March [1898] £91 11s 6d
Helliwell & Co.	patent glazing	Payment date: 9 September 1897 £22 1s 9d
J. Youden & Co.	tiling	Payment date: 25 February 1898 £343 16s 6d
Elder & Co.	steel & iron	Payment date: 29 March [1898] £213 18s 8d
Shirra & Black	smith work & stair railing	Payment date: 5 May [1898] £102 0s 9d
McGeoch & Co.	ironmongery	Payment date: 11 February [1898] £103 6s 9d
A. & J. Scott	painter	Payment date: no data in job book £139 6s 11d ¹⁹
Hunter, McWilliam & Co.	heating apparatus	Payment date: 13 September [1898] £192 16s 6d
J. G. Carrick & Co.	ventilators	Payment date: 17 February 1898 £28 0s 0d ²⁰
Alex. Davie & Co.	no data in job book	Payment date: 17 February 1898 £15 6s 0d ²¹

Documents

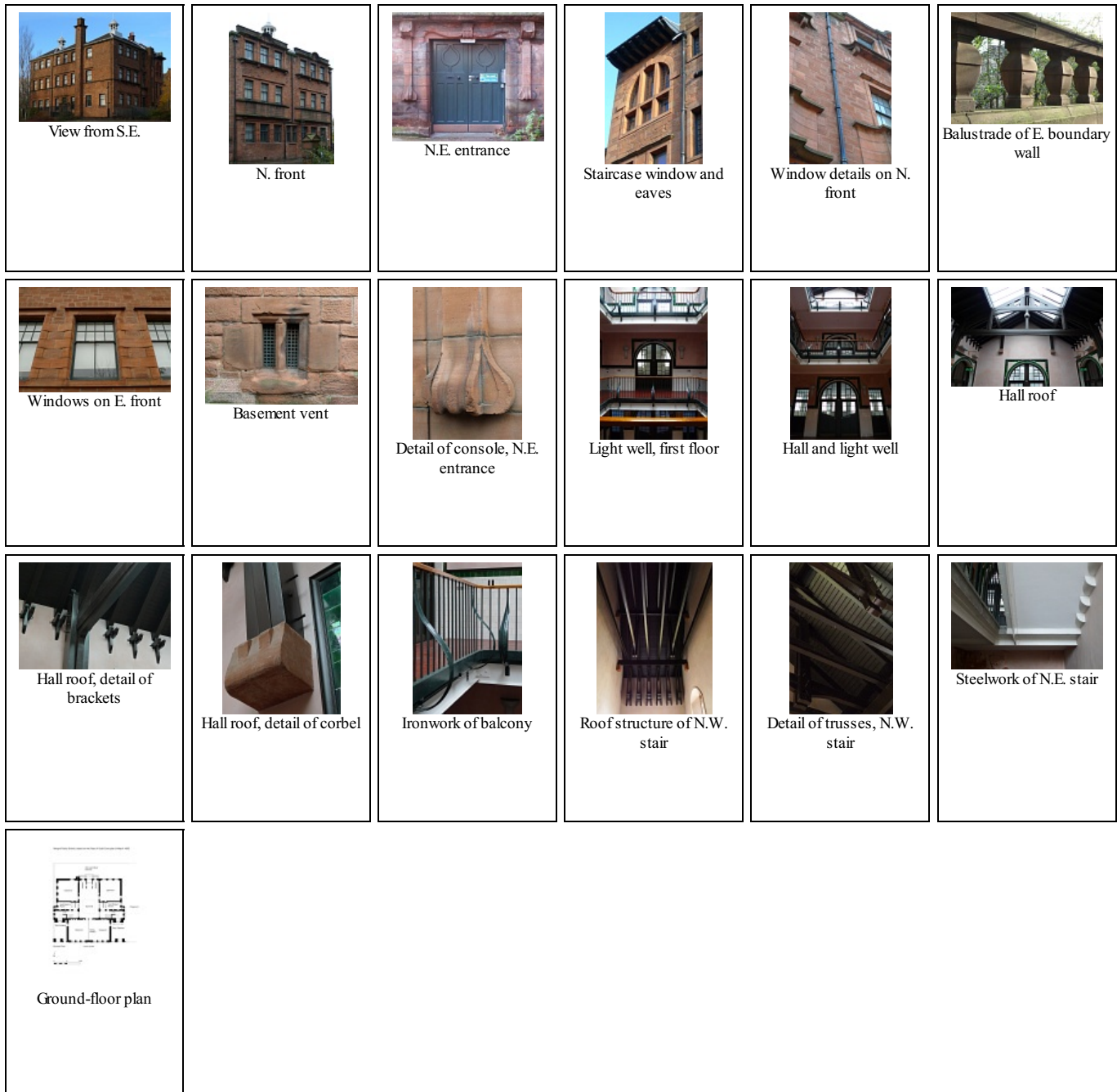


Letter from W.S. Moyes to Thomas Howarth, 29 April 1947, p. 1



Letter from W.S. Moyes to Thomas Howarth, 29 April 1947, p. 2

Images



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- 'Martyrs Public School', *Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society Newsletter*, 71, Spring 1997, p. 8
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- *Architects' Journal*, 158, 19 September 1973, p. 648; 159, 20 March 1974, p. 602
- 'The Architecture of our Large Provincial Towns: XVI, Glasgow', *Builder*, 75, 9 July 1898, pp. 21–34
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Unpublished

- Alison Harris, 'A Report on the present and future condition of the remaining buildings of Charles Rennie Mackintosh', unpublished Dip. Arch. dissertation, Glasgow School of Art, 1976
- Hiroaki Kimura, 'Charles Rennie Mackintosh: Architectural Drawings', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 1982, pp. 27–8
- Glasgow City Archives Collection: Glasgow Dean of Guild Court Proceedings, D-OPW 19/14, p. 83
- Glasgow City Archives Collection: Glasgow Dean of Guild Court, Register of Inspections, D-OPW 25/48, pp. 53, 88
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- University of Toronto, Robarts Library: Letter from W. S. Moyes to Thomas Howarth, 29 April 1947, B96-0028/017 (13)

Notes:

- 1: P. Ballantine, 'Martyrs Public School', *Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society Newsletter*, 9, Autumn 1975, p. 6.
- 2: Glasgow City Archives Collection: School Board of Glasgow Property Department letter book, D-ED 1/1/12/14, G. W. Alexander to John Honeyman & Keppie, 18 January 1895, p. 294.
- 3: Glasgow City Archives Collection: Glasgow Dean of Guild Court Proceedings, D-OPW 19/14, p. 83.
- 4: Glasgow City Archives Collection: Glasgow Dean of Guild Court, Register of Inspections, D-OPW 25/48, pp. 53, 88.
- 5: P. Ballantine, 'Martyrs Public School', *Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society Newsletter*, 9, Autumn 1975, p. 5.
- 6: Glasgow City Archives Collection: Glasgow Dean of Guild Court, Register of Inspections, D-OPW 25/48, pp. 53, 88.
- 7: Glasgow City Archives Collection: Glasgow Dean of Guild Court, Register of Inspections, D-OPW 25/48, pp. 53, 88.
- 8: *Architects' Journal*, 158, 19 September 1973, p. 648; *Architects' Journal*, 159, 20 March 1974, p. 602; Alison Harris, 'A Report on the present and future condition of the remaining buildings of Charles Rennie Mackintosh', unpublished Dip. Arch. dissertation, Glasgow School of Art, 1976.
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- 10: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: letter from Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society to Strathclyde Regional Council, 29 April 1985.
- 11: 'Martyrs School Initiative', *Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society Newsletter*, 43, Summer 1986, p. 4.
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- 14: 'Doors Open Day and Martyrs Public School', *Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society Newsletter*, 63, Winter 1993, p. 9.
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- 16: Paul Stallan, 'The Parson Street Project', *Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society Newsletter*, 75, Spring 1999, p. 4.
- 17: *Glasgow Herald*, 8 October 1859, p. 2.
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- 19: Glasgow City Archives Collection: Glasgow School Board Property Department letter book, D-ED 1/1/12/14, letter to John Honeyman & Keppie, 31 October 1895, p. 989; Glasgow City Archives Collection: Glasgow School Board Property Department letter book, D-ED 1/1/12/15, letter from G. W. Alexander to John Honeyman & Keppie, 18 November 1896, p. 666.
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- 22: University of Toronto, Robarts Library: Letter from W. S. Moyes to Thomas Howarth, 29 April 1947, B96-0028/017 (13); Dublin: National Library of Ireland, Mackintosh sketchbook, PD 2011 TX, p. 30.
- 23: Glasgow City Archives Collection: Glasgow School Board minutes, D-ED 1/1/1, 20 January 1896.
- 24: David Brett, *C. R. Mackintosh: The Poetics of Workmanship*, London: Reaktion, 1992, pp. 83–4.
- 25: *Building News*, 71, 31 July 1896, p. 147; *Academy Architecture*, 9, 1896, p. 80; p. 85.

26: *Glasgow Herald*, 7 March 1896, p. 7.

27: 'The Architecture of our Large Provincial Towns: XVI, Glasgow', *Builder*, 75, 9 July 1898, pp. 21–34.

28: *Architect's Journal*, 158, 19 September 1973, p. 648; *Architect's Journal*, 159, 20 March 1974, p. 602; Alison Harris, 'A Report on the present and future condition of the remaining buildings of Charles Rennie Mackintosh', unpublished Dip. Arch. dissertation, Glasgow School of Art, 1976.

29: 'Martyrs Public School', *Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society Newsletter*, 46, Summer 1987, p. 12; 'Martyrs Public School', *Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society Newsletter*, 71, Spring 1997, p. 8.

30: Original offer £5750 0s 0d.

31: Original offer £2455 18s 11d.

32: Original offer £160 16s 9d.

33: Original offer £500 4s 0d.

34: Original offer £162 12s 7d.

35: Original offer £334 3s 9d.

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42: Original offer £80 12s 0d.

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46: '3 Mams No. 1, 20" diam.'

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48: Includes £4 13s 6d for 'watchman'.

49: For '3 Mams Ventilators'.

50: For '6 BB. Interiors'.

Mackintosh Architecture: Context, Making and Meaning

Led by The Hunterian, University of Glasgow, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council; with additional support from The Monument Trust, The Pilgrim Trust, and the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art; and collaborative input from Historic Scotland and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland.



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