

M255 Gravestone for Dr Alexander Orrock Johnston

Introduction

This is the third of four gravestones made to Mackintosh's design, and the most distinctive. The lettering on the stylised cross was originally cut in stone, but it deteriorated and was replaced in 1933–4 with a bronze plaque, closely following the original inscription.

Authorship: There is a signed drawing by Mackintosh, and the gravestone was published as his work during his lifetime.

Alternative addresses: Castle Wemyss MacDuff Cemetery Shand Terrace

Cost from job book: £83 0s 0d

Status: Standing structure (2014)

Grid reference: NT 3408 9701

Chronology

1905

15 March: Death of Rev. Alexander Orrock Johnston. ¹

5 September: Tenders for gravestone received. ²

1906

12 June: R. A. McGilvray & Ferris paid. ³

1919

27 April: Death of Amy Hepburn Johnston, née Gulland. ⁴

1928

Mackintosh 'under contract' to restore the badly weathered gravestone at the time of his death. ⁵

1933–4

Carved inscription replaced with bronze plaque by Charles d'Orville Pilkington Jackson. ⁶

Description

Background and commission

The Rev. Alexander Orrock Johnston (1840–1905) was born in East Wemyss, Fife, and studied in Edinburgh at the University and at New College. ¹ In 1876 he became the first minister of Westbourne Church in the prosperous West End of Glasgow. ² Soon after his appointment, the congregation replaced their temporary iron church with a handsome new one in Westbourne Gardens, designed by John Honeyman. ³ Later, in 1899, they built Ruchill Free Church Halls as a mission, designed by Mackintosh. Poor health caused the Rev. Johnston to retire in 1898, and he lived in Kilmacolm until his death on 15 March 1905. ⁴

According to Honeyman, Keppie & Mackintosh's job book, the gravestone was commissioned by 'Mrs Johnstone 9 Westbourne Gardens'. ⁵ This must be the Rev. Johnston's widow, Amy Hepburn Johnston, née Gulland. Following his death, she appears to have returned to Glasgow to live in the same affluent residential square as her late husband's church. ⁶

Long-established links with Honeyman, Keppie & Mackintosh no doubt led Mrs Johnston to order her husband's gravestone from the firm, but rather than a classical monument in the style of Honeyman's building, the outcome was a remarkably unhistorical and individualistic work of art by Mackintosh. There can be no doubt that it was an informed choice on the client's part. She would have been familiar with his Ruchill halls, and having lived in Kilmacolm since 1898, she probably also knew his unconventional gravestone for James Reid in the cemetery there. Her daughter Lucy later recalled that the commission was given to Mackintosh 'because we wanted something of intrinsic merit; &, incidentally, C. R. Mackintosh was a friend & would do the work with pleasure & sympathy'. ⁷

Although he carried out the job on behalf of Honeyman, Keppie & Mackintosh, duly recording the tenders and payments in his own hand in the job book, the principal surviving drawing is signed with Mackintosh's own name, not that of the practice.

Drawings and execution

There are two drawings by Mackintosh in The Hunterian, University of Glasgow. The first shows a rough plan and elevation, with a thumbnail sketch of the gravestone's distinctive silhouette in the margin.⁸ The second gives a more detailed plan, plus a number of sections and an elevation.⁹ Radial lines fanning out from the bottom left corner of this drawing seem to have been added in preparation for making a perspective drawing. A third drawing was in the possession of Orrock Johnston's daughter Lucy in 1945, but its present whereabouts is unknown.¹⁰ A perspective drawing of the completed grave, apparently not by Mackintosh, was published in the *British Architect* in October 1912.¹¹

Crease marks show that the second drawing was at one time folded to the size of an envelope, possibly for posting to the carvers, R. A. McGilvray & Ferris. According to the job book, they quoted for 'modelling' as well as 'carving', but the *British Architect* notes that as with Mackintosh's earlier Reid gravestone and his later monument for Talwin Morris, the design was 'modelled full size by the architect', before being 'worked by a capable stonecutter'.¹² McGilvray & Ferris's name is inscribed on the lower right side of the base of the completed monument; a worn inscription on the lower left side may have recorded Mackintosh's name, but is now illegible.



The *British Architect* identifies the material as Dullatur sandstone, with slabs of green Arbroath stone for the border of the plot. The carving was presumably carried out in Glasgow, before the gravestone was transported to East Wemyss. It was erected there by Thomas Brown, a local builder, whose name is inscribed on the second drawing.

Design

At first sight the design has little in common with traditional gravestones, but the description published in the *British Architect* notes its derivation from Celtic crosses of the kind that Mackintosh had imitated more literally in his early gravestone for Chief Constable Alexander McCall: 'The motive is the cross with the circle, the emblem of eternity.'¹³ In the case of the Orrock Johnston gravestone, the circle has become an oval with a slightly pointed top, like a flattened egg, and the cross is compressed almost beyond recognition into a T shape.



With its weighty horizontal element projecting beyond a narrower base, it resembles certain of Mackintosh's furniture designs, such as the 1901 bookcase for Windyhill and the 1904 writing cabinet for The Hill House.¹⁴

The dove with outstretched wings hovering above the inscription is the traditional embodiment of the Holy Spirit, but the *British Architect* identifies it only as 'the emblem of peace'.¹⁵ Mackintosh had earlier used it to convey the same meaning in his stencilled mural decorations of 1901 at St Serf's church, Dysart, not far from East Wemyss.¹⁶ The quotation underneath from St John's gospel, chapter 12, verse 17, is the only overtly Christian feature of the design. According to Lucy Johnston, it was chosen by her mother 'as peculiarly applicable to one whose doctrinal ideas were in advance of his generation & suspect of heresy hunters'.¹⁷



As in the case of the Talwin Morris monument with its weeping ash tree, Mackintosh's design extended to the setting of the grave. He specified a high, curved, yew hedge behind the stone, so that its pale silhouette would stand out against the dark mass of foliage.



It seems the idea of the yew hedge was not in the end carried out, and a willow tree was planted instead. Remembering the gravestone's original appearance, Lucy Johnston wrote in 1933: 'I think that of its kind & in its place – as it then was with falling willow-branches behind – it was a really beautiful thing.'¹⁸

Later history

According to Lucy Johnston, the stone 'became eaten away by the sea air', and although Mackintosh had undertaken to 'recut it & wash it with silicate', he died before this could be done.¹⁹ In May 1933, when the Memorial Exhibition of Mackintosh's work was being held at the McLellan Galleries in Glasgow, she and her brother Sir Frederick Johnston approached the Edinburgh sculptor Charles d'Orville Pilkington Jackson to have the gravestone refurbished.

Pilkington Jackson replaced the damaged inscription with a bronze plaque, adding the name of Amy Hepburn Johnston Gulland, who had died in 1919. The Johnstons attached great importance to reproducing Mackintosh's original inscription on the new plaque – 'as the lettering is also the decoration the spacing is of paramount importance', wrote Lucy Johnston on 27 July 1933 – and there was much discussion on this point between sculptor and clients. ²⁰ In the end, Pilkington Jackson closely followed the layout of the stone inscription, though his letters have serifs where Mackintosh's had none.



The border of Arbroath stone slabs was still present, though damaged, in 1933. ²¹ Now (2014) it has been removed.

People

Clients:

- Mrs Orrock Johnston

Contractors:

- R. A. McGilvray & Ferris
- Thomas Brown

Other:

- Rev. Alexander Orrock Johnston

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 M255 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 M255 has been extracted from the job books:



Job book: 53062
Page: 40

Client: Mrs Orrock Johnston, 9 Westbourne Gardens

Tenders:

Contractor	Type	Date	Value	Accepted
R. A. McGilvray & Ferris	sculpture	5 September [1905]	£67 10s 0d ¹	yes
Thomas Brown	mason	5 September [1905]	£8 5s 10d ²	yes
R. A. McGilvray & Ferris	stonework	5 September [1905]	£7 5s 0d ³	yes

Payments (trades):

Name	Type	Payment out sum
R. A. McGilvray & Ferris	sculpture	Payment date: 12 June 1906 ⁴ £83 0s 0d

Documents

Images



Bibliography

Published

- John Gifford, *Buildings of Scotland: Fife*, London: Penguin, 1988, p. 204
- Thomas Howarth, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2nd edn, 1977, pp. 183–4
- *British Architect*, 78, 11 October 1912, p. 241

Unpublished

- Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland: Pilkington Jackson papers, Acc. 7445, box 13, file 375
- University of Toronto, Robarts Library: Thomas Howarth papers, letter from Lucy Johnston to Thomas Howarth, 30 May 1945, B2000-0002/035(01)

Notes:

- 1: *Glasgow Herald*, 16 March 1905, p. 3.
- 2: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: Honeyman, Keppie & Mackintosh job book, GLAHA 53062, p. 40.
- 3: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: Honeyman, Keppie & Mackintosh job book, GLAHA 53062, p. 40.
- 4: Date inscribed on gravestone.
- 5: University of Toronto, Robarts Library: Thomas Howarth papers, letter from Lucy Johnston to Thomas Howarth, 30 May 1945, B2000-0002/035(01).
- 6: Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland: Pilkington Jackson papers, Acc. 7445, box 13, file 375.
- 7: Rev. William Ewing, *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland*, vol. 1, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1914, p. 194.
- 8: John A. Lamb, *Fasti of the United Free Church of Scotland 1900–1929*, Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1956, pp. 258–9.
- 9: *Glasgow Herald*, 16 March 1905, p. 3.
- 10: *Glasgow Herald*, 16 March 1905, p. 3.
- 11: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: Honeyman, Keppie & Mackintosh job book, GLAHA 53062, p. 40.

- 12:** The 1905–6 *Glasgow Post Office Directory* gives the occupant of 9 Westbourne Gardens as John Wingate (of Hewit & Wingate Ltd, a branch of, and agents for, the Calico Printers Association Ltd). In the 1901 census Wingate is recorded as a visitor at the Johnstons' house in Kilmacolm, and he may have become their son-in-law.
- 13:** University of Toronto, Robarts Library: Thomas Howarth papers, letter from Lucy Johnston to Thomas Howarth, 30 May 1945, B2000-0002/035(01).
- 14:** The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: GLAHA 41929 (M255-002).
- 15:** The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: GLAHA 41930 (M255-001).
- 16:** University of Toronto, Robarts Library: Thomas Howarth papers, letter from Lucy Johnston to Thomas Howarth, 30 May 1945, B2000-0002/035(01).
- 17:** *British Architect*, 78, 11 October 1912, p. 241.
- 18:** *British Architect*, 78, 11 October 1912, p. 241.
- 19:** *British Architect*, 78, 11 October 1912, p. 241.
- 20:** See: Roger Billcliffe, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh: The Complete Furniture, Furniture Drawings and Interior Designs*, Moffat, Dumfriesshire: Cameron & Hollis, 4th edn, 2009, pp. 125–6, 186–9.
- 21:** *British Architect*, 78, 11 October 1912, p. 241.
- 22:** Roger Billcliffe, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh: The Complete Furniture, Furniture Drawings and Interior Designs*, Moffat, Dumfriesshire: Cameron & Hollis, 4th edn, 2009, p. 129; Hermann Muthesius, 'Die Glasgower Kunstbewegung: Charles R. Mackintosh und Margaret Macdonald-Mackintosh', *Dekorative Kunst*, 5, March 1902.
- 23:** Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland: Pilkington Jackson papers, letter from Lucy Johnston to Pilkington Jackson, 7 July 1933, Acc. 7445, box 13, file 375.
- 24:** Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland: Pilkington Jackson papers, letter from Lucy Johnston to Pilkington Jackson, 7 July 1933, Acc. 7445, box 13, file 375.
- 25:** University of Toronto, Robarts Library: Thomas Howarth papers, letter from Lucy Johnston to Thomas Howarth, 30 May 1945, B2000-0002/035(01).
- 26:** Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland: Pilkington Jackson papers, Acc. 7445, box 13, file 375.
- 27:** Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland: Pilkington Jackson papers, letter from Pilkington Jackson to Lucy Johnston, 16 June 1933, Acc. 7445, box 13, file 375.
- 28:** For 'Modelling, carving & delivering stone'.
- 29:** For 'erecting stone & making founds'.
- 30:** For 'Arbroath Slabs'.
- 31:** '1st & Final' payment.

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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