

M329 Designs for buildings in an arcaded street

Introduction

These two elevations belong to a group of speculative designs made by Mackintosh for the town planner Patrick Geddes. They may be connected with Geddes's planning proposals for the Indian city of Lucknow.

Authorship: The drawings are inscribed with Mackintosh's name and are unmistakably in his hand.

Status: Unbuilt

Chronology

1915

12–31 July: Summer Meeting held at King's College, London, co-organised by Patrick Geddes. ¹ At the meeting Mackintosh is given temporary work by Geddes, which involves drawing unspecified plans and elevations. ²

5 August: Mackintosh writes to William Davidson that he has been attending Geddes's lectures and expects to stay with him until the end of the month. ³

1916

Geddes produces a planning report for Lucknow in which he recommends lining Victoria Street with arcaded buildings. ⁴

Description

These two drawings for a warehouse block and a shop-and-office block came to light in a Glasgow flea market in the 1960s. ¹ Their earlier provenance is unknown, but they were almost certainly made for the Scottish sociologist, philosopher and town planner Patrick Geddes, for exhibition or demonstration purposes. They are captioned and inscribed with Mackintosh's name in exactly the same way as a group of designs in Geddes's archive for a fountain, a war memorial and several street lighting standards. ² They were probably made in connection with Geddes's town planning work in India.

Patrick Geddes and India

Geddes's involvement in town planning grew out of his studies in sociology. In 1910 he devised a display of photographs, plans and drawings in connection with the first international town planning conference organised by the Royal Institute of British Architects, known as the Cities and Town Planning Exhibition. Following the success of this, he effectively became a freelance consultant, showing his exhibition in Britain and overseas, and working for municipal authorities as an adviser on urban planning. In 1914 Lord Pentland, the Governor of Madras, invited him to bring the exhibition to India. This began a decade of involvement with Indian town planning, much of which Geddes spent travelling the subcontinent, producing reports, showing his exhibition and giving lectures. ³

Geddes argued against what he saw as the insensitive approach of the British colonial authorities to historic Indian cities, which had resulted in broad, straight streets being driven through dense and intricate urban areas. Victoria Street in Lucknow, created to facilitate military control of the city following the Indian uprising of 1857, was an example of this destructive approach. ⁴ Geddes first visited Lucknow in 1914, and in 1916 he returned and prepared a report on the city in which he suggested how Victoria Street could be improved. He proposed lining it with buildings incorporating ground-floor arcades, where pedestrians would be able to walk and shop under cover from the sun or rain. ⁵ Among his photographs of Lucknow is one showing an old arcaded building, inscribed 'Fine range of buildings – Victoria Street', which he may have identified as a model for imitation. ⁶



Geddes and Mackintosh

Geddes had been a friend since before Mackintosh left Glasgow for Suffolk in 1914. ⁷ When Mackintosh moved to London the following year, amid the distress of being wrongly accused of spying, Geddes found work for him in connection with a summer school he was running at King's College. ⁸ The school was concerned with the consequences of the war, including the post-war reconstruction of cities. ⁹ On 5 August 1915, Mackintosh wrote to his friend and patron William Davidson: 'I am playing around with Prof Geddes at his Summer Meeting here. His lectures are full of interest and enthusiasm and of course

they seem far away from reality – but they are really not. ... I shall be with Geddes more or less till the end of August.' ¹⁰

Philip Mairet, who was also with Geddes at King's that summer, recalled later that Mackintosh's work consisted of drawing 'some plans and elevations', which 'seemed as if inspired by Japan'. ¹¹ One elevation included 'a kind of pergola', and reminded Mairet of Frank Lloyd Wright. Mairet's description would fit Mackintosh's drawing of a shop-and-office block: the shops in the third and seventh bays of the arcade have timber portals strongly reminiscent of Japanese *torii* arches, and the top floor appears to be set back and surrounded by a pergola. It is possible that both elevations of arcaded buildings, along with the fountain, war memorial and lighting standard designs, were made during Mackintosh's time with Geddes and Mairet at King's. Another possibility is that they were made the following year when Geddes was working on his Lucknow report: the arcaded buildings are similar in scale and composition to the Victoria Street building shown in Geddes's photograph, and they may have been made to demonstrate the type of architecture he had in mind for Lucknow.

Style

With their shady arcades and slatted blinds the two buildings are clearly designed to provide shelter from the sun. This was a requirement Mackintosh had certainly not encountered in Glasgow; nor had he previously designed this type of large-scale, mixed-use street architecture, conceived as part of a grand urban scheme (although he may have made some contribution to the big Hope Street tenement in Glasgow, designed by John Keppie). Among his executed buildings, only the Glasgow School of Art and Scotland Street School had been of comparable size, and they were both set back and isolated from the busy life of the street.

But despite the novelty of the challenge, Mackintosh's architecture in these elevations is more traditional than the dazzling draughtsmanship suggests. Behind the abstract geometric patterns of cast shadows, the elevations are more classical than anything he had designed since he was a student, in their symmetry, in their identically repeating bays, in the proportions of their windows and in their orthodox use of arches and columns. ¹² As for the individual style he had forged in Glasgow, there are echoes of the School of Art in the balconies and the recessed top floor of the shop-and-office block; and the new influence of Vienna can be seen in the frieze of parallel lines that frames both elevations (which the drawings hint was intended to be coloured). But there is little acknowledgement of the Indian context beyond superficial oriental trimmings: 'Moorish' arches for the warehouse block, Egyptian lotus bud capitals for the shops and offices.

Mackintosh would perhaps have designed differently had he actually travelled to India and built there. In the letter to Davidson quoted above, he described a work opportunity that must surely have come to him through Geddes: 'I have a tentative offer from the Indian Government to go out there for some 6 months starting in October to do some work in reconstruction schemes where they want me to do the architecture. I have no idea what it costs to live in Bombay or Calcutta but they offer to pay my passage and give me £5 a day while I am there. It sounds all right but it is a long time to be away.' ¹³ The proposal appears to have come to nothing.

People

Clients:

- Patrick Geddes

Documents

Images

Bibliography

Published

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- Gavin Stamp, 'The London Years', in Wendy Kaplan, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh*, New York and London: Abbeville Press, 1996, pp. 201–24
- James S. McGrath, 'Mackintosh Drawings in the University of Strathclyde', *Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society Newsletter*, 50, Winter 1988–9, pp. 9–11
- Pamela Robertson, 'The Unknown Mackintosh', in *Christie's International Magazine*, September 1991, pp. 8–9
- Volker M. Welter, 'Arcades for Lucknow: Patrick Geddes, Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Reconstruction of the City', *Architectural History*, 42, 1999, pp. 316–32

Unpublished

- The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: letter from Mackintosh to William Davidson, 5 August 1915, GLAHA 52538, GLAHA 52536
- The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: letter from Philip Mairet to Murray Grigor, 2 March 1967, GLAHA 52373

Notes:

- 1: Glasgow, Strathclyde University Archives: T-GED 3/12/18.

- 2: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: letter from Philip Mairet to Murray Grigor, 2 March 1967, GLAHA 52373.
- 3: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: letter from Mackintosh to William Davidson, 5 August 1915, GLAHA 52538, GLAHA 52536.
- 4: Volker M. Welter, 'Arcades for Lucknow: Patrick Geddes, Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Reconstruction of the City', *Architectural History*, 42, 1999, pp. 316–32.
- 5: *Glasgow Herald*, 26 September 1991, p. 6.
- 6: Glasgow, Strathclyde University Archives: T-GED 22/1/1413.1, T-GED 22/1/1413.2, T-GED 22/1/1413.3.
- 7: Helen Meller, 'Geddes, Sir Patrick (1854–1932)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004.
- 8: Volker M. Welter, 'Arcades for Lucknow: Patrick Geddes, Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Reconstruction of the City', *Architectural History*, 42, 1999, pp. 316–32.
- 9: Volker M. Welter, 'Arcades for Lucknow: Patrick Geddes, Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Reconstruction of the City', *Architectural History*, 42, 1999, pp. 316–32.
- 10: Glasgow, Strathclyde University Archives: T-GED 22/1/1320.
- 11: James S. McGrath, 'Mackintosh Drawings in the University of Strathclyde', *Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society Newsletter*, 50, Winter 1988–9, pp. 9–11; Volker M. Welter, 'Arcades for Lucknow: Patrick Geddes, Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Reconstruction of the City', *Architectural History*, 42, 1999, pp. 316–32.
- 12: Philip Mairet, *Pioneer of Sociology: The Life and Letters of Patrick Geddes*, London: Lund Humphries, 1957, pp. 170–1.
- 13: Glasgow, Strathclyde University Archives: T-GED 3/12/18.
- 14: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: letter from Mackintosh to William Davidson, 5 August 1915, GLAHA 52538, GLAHA 52536.
- 15: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: letter from Philip Mairet to Murray Grigor, 2 March 1967, GLAHA 52373.
- 16: From his visit to Turin in 1902, Mackintosh would have recalled the spacious classical arcades that line the central streets of that city.
- 17: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: letter from Mackintosh to William Davidson, 5 August 1915, GLAHA 52538, GLAHA 52536.

Mackintosh Architecture: Context, Making and Meaning

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