

# M343 Design for a theatre for Margaret Morris

## Introduction

Mackintosh's unrealised design for a small theatre for the dancer and teacher Margaret Morris was intended for a site in Chelsea. Its striking elevation is reminiscent of Vienna Secession-influenced buildings of 20 years earlier, and the shape of its auditorium recalls Mackintosh's unrealised design for a concert hall for the 1901 Glasgow International Exhibition.

**Authorship:** Drawings for the theatre are signed by Mackintosh, though he was probably not the draughtsman. Mackintosh's 1920 diary records meetings with Margaret Morris.

**Status:** Unbuilt

## Chronology

### 1920

2 June: Margaret Morris visits Mackintosh to discuss her studio. <sup>1</sup>

5 June: Margaret Morris asks Mackintosh to prepare sketch plans for her studio for a meeting with the District Surveyor. <sup>2</sup>

17 June: Mackintosh meets with the District Surveyor, Mr Clifton, and leaves plans of the theatre with him. <sup>3</sup>

26 August: Mackintosh meets with Mr Clifton to discuss the theatre and block of studios. <sup>4</sup>

1 September: At a meeting with Mr Clifton, Mackintosh is informed of objections to the theatre and block of studios. <sup>5</sup>

13 December: Mr Clifton informs Mackintosh that planning consent for the block of studios has been provisionally approved; there is no mention of the theatre. <sup>6</sup>

## Description

### Background

This unrealised design for a small theatre was commissioned in 1920 by pioneering dancer and teacher, Margaret Morris, whose Chelsea theatre club Mackintosh and Margaret Macdonald frequented. <sup>1</sup> It is known through two sheets of drawings and a number of entries in Mackintosh's 1920 diary, and is mentioned in Margaret Morris's 1974 biography of J. D. Fergusson. <sup>2</sup>

The Theatre was one of several architectural commissions Mackintosh worked on in the years 1919–21, all intended to stand on the Glebe of Chelsea, an area of land owned by the church. <sup>3</sup> The other projects – almost entirely unrealised – were a block of studios and studio-flats for the Arts League of Service, a second studio block for the League in Glebe Place, a studio-house for Harold Squire, a studio-house for Arthur Cadogan Blunt and a building containing studios for Francis Derwent Wood. These studio buildings were all intended for a large site between Oakley Street, Glebe Place and Upper Cheyne Row, and it is likely that the Theatre was meant for part of the same site too.

According to Mackintosh's diary, discussions with Margaret Morris began in early June. By 17 June plans had been drawn up in preparation for a meeting with the Glebe Surveyor, W. E. Clifton. A second meeting followed in late August, where the designs for the theatre and for one of the studio blocks were discussed. <sup>4</sup> On 1 September Clifton informed Mackintosh that 'both Archdeacon Bevan and the Earl of Cadogan's agent object to both the studio block and the theatre block as unsuitable buildings for this locality'. <sup>5</sup> In mid December, Mackintosh recorded in his diary that planning consent for the block of studios had been 'provisionally approved', but he made no mention of the theatre, and ultimately the project was abandoned. <sup>6</sup>

### Drawings

The drawings, in pen and watercolour with alterations in pencil, appear to have been made for presentation. <sup>7</sup> Materials are not specified, and there is little indication of interior treatment. They are signed by Mackintosh, but the draughtsmanship and style of lettering suggest they were by another hand. Mackintosh is known to have employed at least one draughtsman in 1920, Paul Hudson, to prepare drawings for Harold Squire's studio. <sup>8</sup>

What may be a preliminary sketch plan and section of the theatre appear in Mackintosh's 'Sketcher's Notebook'; the basic shape of the auditorium is very

similar to the later design.<sup>9</sup>



## Exterior

The low central entrance is set between two octagonal towers with hemispherical domes. Rising behind it are the higher, roughly cubic shapes of the auditorium and fly tower. The massive, blocky character of the windowless entrance front recalls Josef Maria Olbrich's 1897–8 Secession building in Vienna, where Mackintosh had exhibited in 1900.<sup>10</sup> The distinctive stepped architrave around the entrance can be likened to work by Czech architect Jan Kotěra, particularly his pavilion for the Chamber of Commerce and Industry at the 1908 Jubilee Exhibition in Prague.<sup>11</sup>

## Interior

The theatre was designed to seat 470: 440 in the egg-shaped auditorium and a further 30 in the five boxes above. Its form recalls to some extent the round auditorium of Mackintosh's unrealised design for a concert hall for the 1901 Glasgow International Exhibition.<sup>12</sup> Unlike the platform in the concert hall design, which was inside the auditorium space, the theatre stage was conventionally separated from the audience by a proscenium arch.<sup>13</sup> To either side of the ground-floor were circular lounges, expressed externally by the domed towers, and behind them, long, narrow lounges along both side elevations, each with curved end walls. The basement comprised a large rehearsal room, dressing rooms, storage spaces and services. A large foyer, balconies and additional dressing rooms were located on the first floor, with a 'cinematograph box' above the foyer. The curved internal walls suggest that Mackintosh intended to build in concrete.

## People

### Clients:

- Margaret Morris

## Job Book

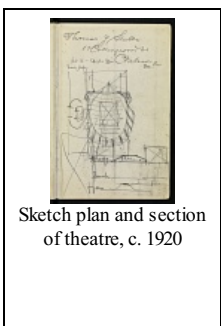
The job books of Honeyman & Keppie (later Honeyman, Keppie & Mackintosh) are now held by The Hunterian, University of Glasgow and include four volumes related to the Mackintosh period. The books were used by the firm to keep a project-by-project, day-by-day record of contractors, suppliers and expenditure. 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 M343 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 M343 has been extracted from the job books:

## Documents

## Images



# Bibliography

## Published

- Alan Crawford, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1995, pp. 182–3
- Thomas Howarth, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2nd edn, 1977, pp. 213–5
- Margaret Morris, *The Art of J. D. Fergusson: A Biased Biography*, Glasgow: Blackie, 1974

## Unpublished

- Hiroaki Kimura, 'Charles Rennie Mackintosh: Architectural Drawings Catalogue and Design Analytical Catalogue', University of Glasgow: unpublished PhD thesis, 1982, pp. 64–5, 268
- The Hunterian: University of Glasgow: Mackintosh's 1920 diary, GLAHA 52408

## Notes:

- 1: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: Mackintosh's diary for 1920, 2 June 1920 GLAHA 52408.
- 2: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: Mackintosh's diary for 1920, 5 June 1920, GLAHA 52408. The district surveyor was an employee of London County Council.
- 3: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: Mackintosh's diary for 1920, 17 June 1920, GLAHA 52408.
- 4: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: Mackintosh's diary for 1920, 26 August 1920, GLAHA 52408.
- 5: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: Mackintosh's diary for 1920, 1 September 1920, GLAHA 52408.
- 6: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: Mackintosh's diary for 1920, 13 December 1920, GLAHA 52408.
- 7: Margaret Morris, *The Art of J. D. Fergusson: A Biased Biography*, Glasgow: Blackie, 1974, p. 121; Alan Crawford, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1995, p. 166.
- 8: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: Mackintosh's diary for 1920, GLAHA 52408; Margaret Morris, *The Art of J. D. Fergusson: A Biased Biography*, Glasgow: Blackie, 1974, p. 132.
- 9: Alan Crawford, 'Lost and Found: Architectural Projects after Glasgow', in *C. R. Mackintosh: The Chelsea Years 1915–1923*, exh. cat., 1994, pp. 8–9.
- 10: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: Mackintosh's diary for 1920, 17 June 1920; 26 August 1920, GLAHA 52408.
- 11: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: Mackintosh's diary for 1920, 1 September 1920, GLAHA 52408.
- 12: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: Mackintosh's diary for 1920, 13 December 1920, GLAHA 52408.
- 13: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: GLAHA 52590 (M343-002); GLAHA 52591 (M343-001).
- 14: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: Mackintosh's diary for 1920, 29 March 1920; 30 March 1920, GLAHA 52408.
- 15: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: GLAHA 53015/4, 'Sketcher's Notebook', p. 3. Included among sketches thought to have been drawn by Margaret Morris for studio-theatre spaces she is known to have rented are also drawings for a stand-alone theatre. These drawings are unfortunately not dated and so it is not known if they predated Morris's engagement of Mackintosh. Perth, Fergusson Gallery: Margaret Morris Collection, 2010.718, 'MM theatre box' (uncatalogued in June 2012).
- 16: Andrew McLaren Young, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868–1928): Architecture, Design and Painting*, exhibition catalogue, Edinburgh: Edinburgh Festival Society and Scottish Arts Council, 1968, p. 74.
- 17: Akos Moravanszky, *Competing Visions: Aesthetic Invention and Social Imagination in Central European Architecture, 1867–1918*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998, p. 204. It seems likely that Kotěra was known to Mackintosh: his work was also shown at the Moscow Architecture and Design of the New Style exhibition in 1902–3. Catherine Cooke, 'Shekhtel in Kelvingrove and Mackintosh on the Petrovka: Two Russo-Scottish Exhibitions at the Turn of the Century', *Scottish Slavonic Review*, 10, 1988, p. 196. Kotěra was also a pupil of Otto Wagner in Vienna during the mid-1890s with contemporaries including Mackintosh's acquaintances Josef Maria Olbrich and Josef Hoffmann.
- 18: Alan Crawford, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1995, p. 182; The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: GLAHA 52560 (M153-001).
- 19: The stage included a revolving section – an 1890s innovation. Richard and Helen Leacroft, *Theatre and Playhouse*, London: Methuen, 1984, p. 120.

# 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.



[© copyright 2014](#)

[Contact us](#)