



MX.08 Robinsfield

Introduction

The former home and studio of the Glasgow painter Robert Macaulay Stevenson, Robinsfield was created from the early to mid-1890s onwards by greatly extending a modest, probably early 19th-century house.

Authorship: In the 1980s Stevenson's daughter reportedly said that Mackintosh collaborated with her father on extending Robinsfield, but there is no documentary evidence for this, and the building does not resemble Mackintosh's known works. Mackintosh did however make proposals around 1910 for repainting the interior of the studio.

Status: Standing building

Current use: Residential (2014)

Listing category: B

Historic Scotland/HB Number: 5724

RCAHMS Site Number: NS57SE 106

Grid reference: NS 58003 73307

Chronology

1890

Robinsfield acquired by the landscape painter Robert Macaulay Stevenson. ¹

1895

Transformation into 'an ideal home and studio' in progress. ²

c. 1910

The Stevensons leave Robinsfield to live in France, following Robert Macaulay Stevenson's bankruptcy. Mackintosh draws rough plan of studio and makes notes for redecoration, probably for Hugh R. Buchanan. ³

c. 1985-7

Robinsfield subdivided into flats. ⁴

Description

Robinsfield was the home and studio of the landscape painter Robert Macaulay Stevenson (1854–1952). His biography in *Who's Who in Glasgow in 1909* describes its evolution: 'in 1890 he acquired an old jointure house with outbuildings on the shore of the picturesque Bardowie Loch. This he has constantly added to, and metamorphosed, till it has endless features of quaint artistic charm, and the great studio which forms part of it is perhaps the finest in Scotland. From the windows of this studio, looking northward over the loch to the Campsie Fells, he has the whole material for his pictures before him all the time.' ¹

Mackintosh may well have known Stevenson in the 1890s, through their mutual involvement in the Glasgow art world. He certainly knew his second wife, the painter Stansmore Dean (1866–1944), having been a fellow student with her at the Glasgow School of Art. ² She married Stevenson in 1902, and as convener of the decoration committee of the Society of Lady Artists' Club in Glasgow, she engaged Mackintosh to alter the Blythswood Square premises of the Society in 1908. In the 1980s, Robert Macaulay Stevenson's daughter Jean 'recalled her father's association with Mackintosh and that many aspects of the design [of Robinsfield] were done in consultation with the architect'. ³ However, there is no documentary evidence for this, and what appears to be the earliest suggestion that Mackintosh collaborated with Stevenson on this project occurs in the description of the house written following its listing in 1977. ⁴

It has been said that Stevenson's additions date from 1907, ⁵ but in fact they were begun more than a decade earlier. The O.S. map of Stirlingshire surveyed in 1860 shows Robinsfield before Stevenson got to work: a simple, rectangular house facing the road, with three smaller outbuildings grouped around a rear yard. ⁶ By 1896, when the map was revised for the second edition, the original house had been doubled in depth and a N.E. wing added. ⁷ That the work of extension was already underway in the mid 1890s is also indicated by a brief notice about Stevenson in the *New York Times* of 20 August 1895, which

mentions that the artist 'is building himself an ideal home and studio at Robinsfield, Bardowie, by Milngarvie [sic], a dozen miles from Glasgow'.⁸ There is no mention of Robinsfield in the Register of New Buildings for the Western District of Stirlingshire, which begins in 1900 when the County authority first began to exercise control over new buildings.⁹ This suggests that the additions were probably complete before the end of the century.

The original three-bay house is still recognisable today (2011), despite Stevenson's much larger extensions to the N. He built over the yard, demolishing or absorbing the outbuildings to create a big, irregular, more or less square block, thoroughly Scottish in character, with crow-stepped gables, conical-roofed stair turrets and a rectangular tower at the N.E. corner. His former studio occupies the N. side of this block, with a large window overlooking the loch. Another studio, looking E., was used by Stansmore Dean,¹⁰ and possibly also by the first Mrs Stevenson, who was an artist too. A detached single-storey building – originally stables – stands just E. of the house.



There is nothing about the style of these additions to indicate that Mackintosh had anything to do with their design. The various elevations have a haphazard appearance, suggesting piecemeal growth rather than an architect's coherent, unifying vision. It seems quite possible that Stevenson acted as his own architect, and the seemingly erratic progress of the work may have been due to his lack of ready cash. James Bridie, son of Mackintosh's client Henry A. Mavor, recalled childhood visits to see 'Macaulay Stevenson, the Scottish Corot, in the farmhouse he was gradually building up into a castle, paying his joiners and stone masons and praying [sic] plumbers, as often as not, with delicate sonatas and symphonies and songs without words done in misty paint.'¹¹ Details such as the battlements at the W. end of the studio and the parapet of the N.E. tower are clumsily over-scaled, and even allowing for alterations made in the late 20th century, the window openings are oddly proportioned and roughly executed.



According to the much later recollections of Jean Macaulay Stevenson, the main staircase inside was redesigned by Mackintosh c. 1906–7,¹² but there is no documentation to corroborate this.

The only firm evidence for Mackintosh's involvement at Robinsfield comes later, and relates to the interior redecoration of the main studio. In his Sketcher's Notebook (undated, but containing drawings mostly from the period c. 1912–c. 1920) Mackintosh drew a rough plan of this room, with measurements, accompanied by the following notes: '1 Restrain Roof – Darker shade'; '2 Water Paint on Compo walls'; '3 Extra for stippling to get bloom effect – colour to be grey stone like inner piece of chimney'; '4 Paint behind – stove [?];' and '5 Floor to be made good and left as at present.'¹³ The name and telephone number of the house are inscribed inside the back cover of the notebook, along with two alternative addresses for Stevenson in France: at Montreuil-sur-Mer, Pas de Calais, and at Equihen near Outreau on the outskirts of Boulogne-sur-Mer. Stevenson had become bankrupt in 1910, and soon afterwards he and his wife left Robinsfield for France where they spent the years of the First World War, not returning to Bardowie until 1926.¹⁴ Robinsfield was let to Hugh R. Buchanan, solicitor to the Caledonian Railway, who is listed there for the first time in the *Glasgow Post Office Directory* for 1911–12. His name is also inscribed in the 'Sketcher's Notebook', all of which suggests that Mackintosh's proposals for redecorating the studio were made for Buchanan, probably in or shortly after 1910.¹⁵ It is not clear if they were carried out.

In 1985, planning permission was sought to convert Robinsfield and its stables into flats; the work was completed by 1987.¹⁶ Outside, the windows were all replaced. Internal alterations included lining the hall and stairs with pseudo-Mackintosh panelling and horizontally subdividing the large studio.¹⁷ The gatehouse was completely rebuilt.

People

Clients:

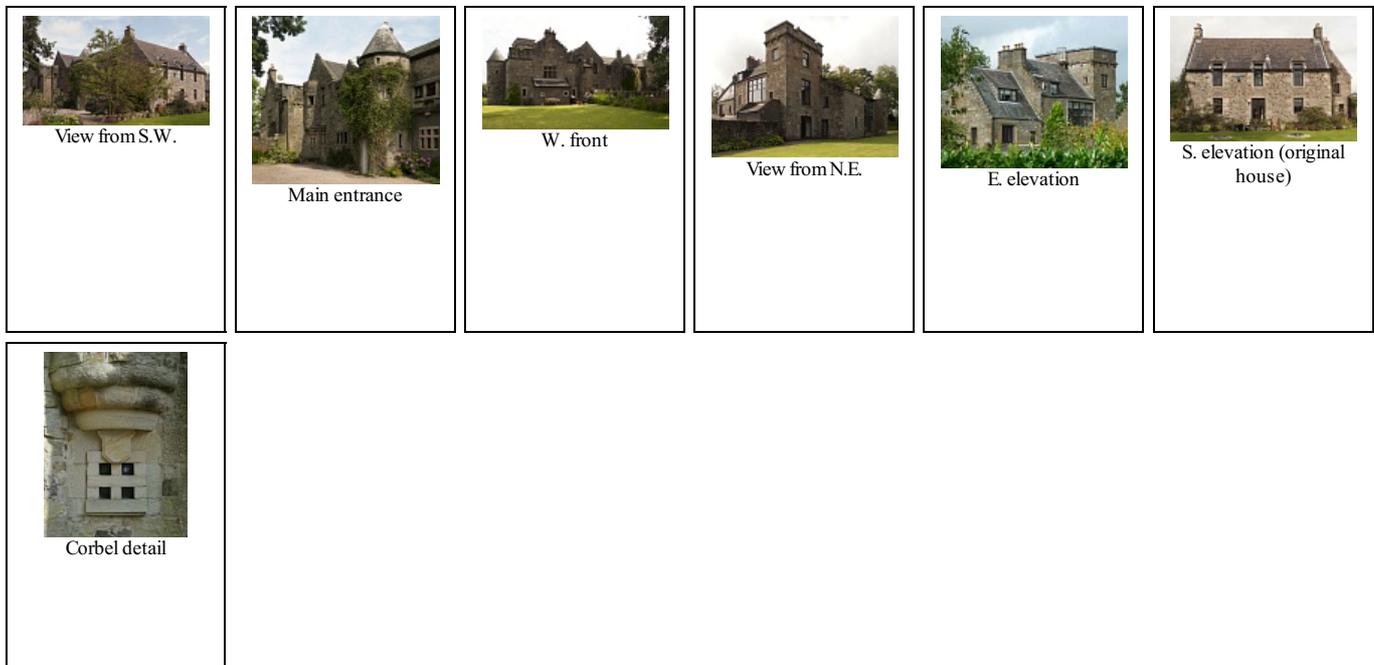
- Hugh R. Buchanan

Other:

- Robert Macaulay Stevenson
- Mrs Robert Macaulay Stevenson

Documents

Images



Bibliography

Published

- James Bridie, *One Way of Living*, London: Constable & Co. Ltd, 1939, p. 49
- George Eyre-Todd, *Who's Who in Glasgow in 1909*, Glasgow: Gowans & Gray, 1909, p. 199

Unpublished

- The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: Sketcher's Notebook, GLAHA 53015/6

Notes:

- 1: George Eyre-Todd, *Who's Who in Glasgow in 1909*, Glasgow: Gowans & Gray, 1909, p. 199.
- 2: *New York Times*, 20 August 1895, p. 4.
- 3: *Edinburgh Gazette*, 29 July 1910, p. 812; Ailsa Tanner, 'Glasgow Girls (act. 1880–1920)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: GLAHA 53015/2, GLAHA 53015/6 (MX.08-001).
- 4: *Edinburgh Gazette*, 4 January 1985, p. 7; information from owners (2011).
- 5: George Eyre-Todd, *Who's Who in Glasgow in 1909*, Glasgow: Gowans & Gray, 1909, p. 199.
- 6: Ailsa Tanner, 'Glasgow Girls (act. 1880–1920)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004.
- 7: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: unidentified newspaper cutting.
- 8: Listed Building Report for Robinsfield: www.historic-scotland.gov.uk [accessed 17 March 2013].
- 9: Listed Building Report for Robinsfield: www.historic-scotland.gov.uk [accessed 17 March 2013].
- 10: O.S., Stirlingshire, 1:2500, sheet XXXII.7, 1864.
- 11: O.S., Stirlingshire, 1:2500, sheet XXXII.7, 1898.
- 12: *New York Times*, 20 August 1895, p. 4.
- 13: Stirling Council Archives Service: Register of New Buildings, Western District [of Stirlingshire], uncatalogued.
- 14: Ailsa Tanner, 'Glasgow Girls (act. 1880–1920)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004.
- 15: James Bridie, *One Way of Living*, London: Constable & Co., 1939, p. 49.
- 16: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: unidentified newspaper cutting.

17: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: GLAHA 53015/6.

18: *Edinburgh Gazette*, 29 July 1910, p. 812; Ailsa Tanner, 'Glasgow Girls (act. 1880–1920)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004.

19: Mrs Macaulay Stevenson exhibited a portrait of a 'Mrs H. R. Buchanan' at the Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts in 1910 (216).

20: *Edinburgh Gazette*, 4 January 1985, p. 7; information from present owners (2011).

21: Information from present owners (2011).

Mackintosh Architecture: Context, Making and Meaning

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