

M091 Helensburgh Conservative Club

Introduction

This impressive and highly distinctive building stands in one of the main commercial streets of Helensburgh and comprises club rooms above ground-floor shops.

Authorship: The drawings submitted to Helensburgh Dean of Guild Court cannot now (2014) be traced, but they are known from photographs which show that they had annotations in Mackintosh's hand. There is no documentary evidence that he designed this building, but it is difficult to see who else in John Honeyman & Keppie's office in the early 1890s could have been responsible for its more individual features. Certain details, such as the carving around the ground-floor entrance to the club rooms and the unusual treatment of the right-hand bay, have parallels in other works of around the same date, such as the Music Room at Craigie Hall and the first phase of the Glasgow School of Art, where Mackintosh's authorship is more certain. Corroboratory evidence is provided by Ronald Harrison, an early student of Mackintosh's architecture in the 1930s who had access to the office records. He included the Conservative Club on lists he compiled of works he believed were by Mackintosh, and of drawings produced in the office during Mackintosh's time.

Cost from job book: £3505 12s 10d

Cost from other sources: At the official opening it was reported that members had subscribed £4000 towards the new building, but a further £1000 would be needed to clear all debts. ¹

Status: Standing building

Current name: M & Co.

Current use: Shop (2014)

Listing category: A

Historic Scotland/HB Number: 34868

RCAHMS Site Number: NS28SE 132

Grid reference: NS 29673 82333

Chronology

1894

23 April: Plans approved by Helensburgh Dean of Guild Court. ¹

15 September: Foundation stone laid by Colonel Colquhoun. ²

1895

July: Building 'informally' opened. ³

9 December: Official opening by the Lord Advocate. ⁴

Description

Origins

John Honeyman had family connections with Helensburgh – his father had his principal residence there by 1861, it seems – and he worked extensively in and around the town. ¹ Long before his partnership with John Keppie, he carried out commissions for members of the locally influential Kidston family, including Park Free Church and the houses Ferniegair and Glenoran. ² The commission for the Conservative Club presumably came to John Honeyman & Keppie as a result of these established links: the Kidston family gave the site; the chairman of the building committee was William Hamilton Kidston; and other members of the family were present at the laying of the foundation stone. ³

Exterior

Situated in the town centre on a busy commercial thoroughfare, the three-storey club was designed to have rent-producing shops at street level. The ground floor is now one continuous modern shopfront (there were originally two), with the entrance to the club on the left under a round-arched hood. Above, the red sandstone ashlar facade swells into two shallow canted bays, the left one rising through two storeys, the one on the right confined to the second floor. First-floor windows are mullioned and transomed, those on the second floor are sashes, set deep in the thickness of the wall. At roof level the bays merge into an undulating, chamfered parapet, rising to a little hump in the middle where the wall is pierced by an opening filled with Gothic tracery. An arched recess between the first-floor windows encloses a carved relief of St Andrew.



At the laying of the foundation stone the *Glasgow Herald* described the style as 'Renaissance'.⁴ Certain details do indeed appear to be derived from Scottish buildings of the late 16th century: the slender, round shafts that mark the angles of the bays and frame some of the windows recall both Maybole Castle in Ayrshire and Mar's Work in Stirling, and, as at Maybole, the shafts rest on corbels in the form of human heads.⁵ John Honeyman & Keppie had already used this distinctive feature from Maybole at Dunloe, the Wemyss Bay mansion the practice designed in 1889–91. At Helensburgh, however, the shafts are given a Gothic flavour by knots of foliage at the angles, while the frame above the left-hand bay sprouts into a strikingly stylised carving of a tree. This may reflect the influence of late Gothic Revival architects in England such as Henry Wilson (1864–1934), whose design for Ladbrooke Grove Free Library, published in the *Architect* in 1890, features the tree motif prominently.⁶ At Helensburgh, however, the intricate decorative details are distributed sparsely across large areas of smooth wall in a distinctly Scottish way.



The drawings submitted to Helensburgh Dean of Guild Court cannot now (2014) be traced, but they are known from photographs which appear to show annotations in Mackintosh's hand.⁷ In the absence of other documentation, one can do no more than identify features of the building that point to Mackintosh's possible involvement. The consoles flanking the door, for instance, have wavy leaves carved on their flat sides, very like the built-in library armchair at Craigie Hall; decoration under the second-floor cills recalls the Glasgow Herald tower (the same carver, James Young, worked on both buildings); and the prominent mouldings along the transoms of the first-floor windows anticipate the frieze-rail that Mackintosh would later extend across the drawing room windows in his Mains Street flat. The right-hand bay is supported visually by a curious ledge, the square corners of which stick out beyond the bay's canted sides: this odd detail is similar to Mackintosh's treatment, a couple of years later, of the two-storey oriel beside the entrance to the Glasgow School of Art.



Interior

The original ground-floor shops were long and narrow, stretching back the full depth of the plot. Today the central division has been removed, and they form a single, wider space. Cast-iron columns support the cross-walls of the upper floors – the original arrangement – giving a completely open plan.

A corridor and stone staircase lead from the street to the former club on the upper floors. The 1894–5 layout here is largely preserved, but the rooms are now used for storage in connection with the ground-floor shop. The former Smoking Room and Reading Room are at the front of the first floor (originally a movable partition divided them, but this has gone). They are separated from the former Hall at the rear by a light well, which originally provided top-lighting to the deep-plan shops below. The Hall is reached from the half-landing by a top-lit passage. The caretaker's kitchen and parlour are tucked between the front rooms and the light well. The stairs continue to the top floor, where the former Billiard Room overlooks the street, with smaller rooms behind, including a committee room.

Much of the interior detailing is unusual enough to suggest the possibility that Mackintosh contributed to its design, but as with the exterior, it is impossible to be sure. Panelling in the Billiard Room is stained dark grey and divided into broad, vertical, plank-like sections. It is superficially similar to the panelling at Queen's Cross Church and the Glasgow School of Art, but the sections do not correspond to the width of individual boards, and the applied wooden strips that divide them are moulded rather than flat. On the stairs, the top of the panelled dado follows a series of elegant curves at the half-landing.



The most distinctive woodwork is in the Hall, but temporary storage racks in connection with the room's present use make it difficult to see. The round-arched fireplace at the N. end is flanked by thin pilasters with scrolly, heart-shaped capitals. A band of simple, flat, horizontal mouldings at door-top height glides smoothly down in a sinuous S-curve, passing behind these pilasters before becoming horizontal again where it joins the mantel shelf.



The Reading Room and Smoking Room retain none of their original fittings, except the stained glass in the upper lights of the windows, its Prince of Wales feathers outlined in sinuous leading. The stairs have a wrought-iron balustrade with highly unorthodox wooden newel posts.



The Hall roof is now obscured by a suspended ceiling, but the Billiard Room has an open timber roof with arch-braced trusses. It is of a type found in several John Honeyman & Keppie buildings of the 1890s, and it does not show the novel joinery and pierced decoration found in Mackintosh's roofs at Queen's Cross church hall and the Glasgow School of Art. More distinctive is the simpler roof of the passage leading from the half-landing to the Hall, in which the trusses incorporate round arches with the merest hint of an ogee.



Fireplaces at each end of the Billiard Room have shouldered architraves which flow upwards into sinuous ogee lintels. This is the earliest appearance of a pattern used repeatedly for door and window surrounds at other John Honeyman & Keppie projects of the 1890s with which Mackintosh was probably involved: the Queen Margaret College Anatomical Department, the Glasgow Herald building and Martyrs Public School. Here, however, the ogee retains its central point, so that its source in such medieval prototypes as the Skelmorlie aisle at Largs is more apparent.



Alterations

A staircase has been introduced, giving access from the shop to the first floor. It leads to a corridor created by partitioning off the W. side of the Hall.

Critical reception

John Honeyman & Keppie showed a drawing of the club in the 1895 exhibition of the Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts (278). It was probably the perspective for which there is an entry in the office cash book for a payment of £4 4s on 8 August 1894 (the project is named but not the draughtsman).⁸ Reviewing it, the *Glasgow Herald* singled out the shopfronts for unfavourable comment: 'Perhaps it is not the fault of the architects that the Conservative Club, Helensburgh ... is supported on plate-glass shop windows, but surely a better treatment of these could have been devised.'⁹ Interestingly, Mackintosh himself had spoken out a few years earlier against such large areas of glazing, when he observed in his 1892 lecture on 'Architecture' that 'the eye is distressed at huge lofty tenements resting to all appearance on nothing more stable than plate glass'.¹⁰ As for the rest of the Helensburgh facade, the *Herald* recognised its novelty but did not think it would be of lasting interest: 'The upper part ... is not wanting in freshness, though we cannot believe that this kind of architecture will command any permanent admiration.'¹¹ Reporting its opening eight months later, the newspaper had little to say about the building, describing it simply as 'an important addition to the architectural features of the town'.¹² But the *Helensburgh Year Book* of 1896 was more enthusiastic, praising the new club as 'one of the most artistic in Scotland'.¹³

People

Clients:

- Helensburgh and Gareloch Conservative Association
- William Hamilton Kidston

Contractors:

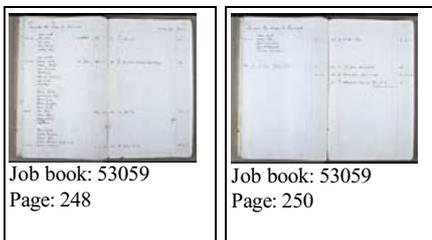
- W. H. Dinsmore
- William Gartshore
- John Horne
- John Jack
- William Jack
- George A. Sillars
- W. Thom
- James Young

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 M091 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 M091 has been extracted from the job books:



Client: no data in job book

Measurer: W. H. Dinsmore

Tenders:

Contractor	Type	Address	Date	Value	Accepted
John Jack	mason	no data in job book	no data in job book	£1710 0s 0d ¹	yes
Alexander Miller	mason	no data in job book	no data in job book	£1710 0s 0d ²	no
Sheen & Tweedie	mason	no data in job book	no data in job book	£1765 7s 9d	no
Anthony Trail	mason	no data in job book	no data in job book	£1721 17s 9d ³	no
William Jack	joiner	no data in job book	no data in job book	£1186 0s 0d ⁴	yes
William Bishop	joiner	no data in job book	no data in job book	no data in job book ⁵	no
James Ferguson	joiner	no data in job book	no data in job book	no data in job book ⁶	no
J. & R. Grant	joiner	no data in job book	no data in job book	£1364 18s 10½d	no
Alexander Henderson	joiner	no data in job book	no data in job book	£1157 11s 3d ⁷	no
John Dick	joiner	no data in job book	no data in job book	£1227 5s 8d	no
J. & W. Reid	joiner	no data in job book	no data in job book	no data in job book	no
Hugh Kerr	joiner	no data in job book	no data in job book	no data in job book ⁸	no
John Wilson	joiner	no data in job book	no data in job book	no data in job book ⁹	no

W. McKinlay & Son	plumber	no data in job book	no data in job book	£196 18s 4d	no
Charles Condy	plumber	no data in job book	no data in job book	£183 7s 10d ¹⁰	no
Thomas Crawford	plumber	no data in job book	no data in job book	£197 5s 0d	no
James Grant	plumber	no data in job book	no data in job book	£189 6s 9d	no
John Horne	plumber	no data in job book	no data in job book	£177 0s 7½d	yes
William Kyle	plumber	no data in job book	no data in job book	£189 0s 0d	no
James McKindy	plumber	no data in job book	no data in job book	no data in job book ¹¹	no
J. & W. Reid	plumber	no data in job book	no data in job book	no data in job book	no
George Rome	plaster	no data in job book	no data in job book	£139 0s 0d	no
Donald Dempster	plaster	no data in job book	no data in job book	not recorded	no
William Thom	plaster	no data in job book	no data in job book	£151 0s 0d	no
William Thompson	plaster	65 James Street	no data in job book	£112 12s 10d ¹²	no
William Gartshore	plaster	no data in job book	no data in job book	£113 12s 1¾d	yes
James Grant	plaster	Alloa	no data in job book	£127 1s 7d	no
James Maitland	plaster	no data in job book	no data in job book	£134 17s 8½d	no
R. A. McGilvray	plaster	no data in job book	no data in job book	£134 2s 0d	no
William [illeg.]	plaster	no data in job book	no data in job book	£127 11s 9d	no
W. Thom	slater	no data in job book	no data in job book	£82 6s 3d	yes
James Maitland	slater	no data in job book	no data in job book	£88 6s 10½d ¹³	no
John D. Brownlie	slater	no data in job book	no data in job book	no data in job book	no
Donald Dempster	slater	no data in job book	no data in job book	£104 6s 6d	no
James Young	carving	no data in job book	19 October [1894]	£40 0s 0d	yes (21 November 1894)

Payments (trades):

Name	Type	Payment out sum
John Jack	mason	Payment date: 8 January 1896 £1638 0s 11d
William Jack	joiner	Payment date: 30 December 1895 £1272 1s 0d ¹⁴
John Horne	plumber	Payment date: 30 December [1895] £198 5s 2d
William Gartshore	plaster	Payment date: 22 November [1895] £116 17s 7d
W. Thom	slater	Payment date: 30 December [1895] £66 18s 1½d
James Young	carving	Payment date: 7 June £43 0s 0d

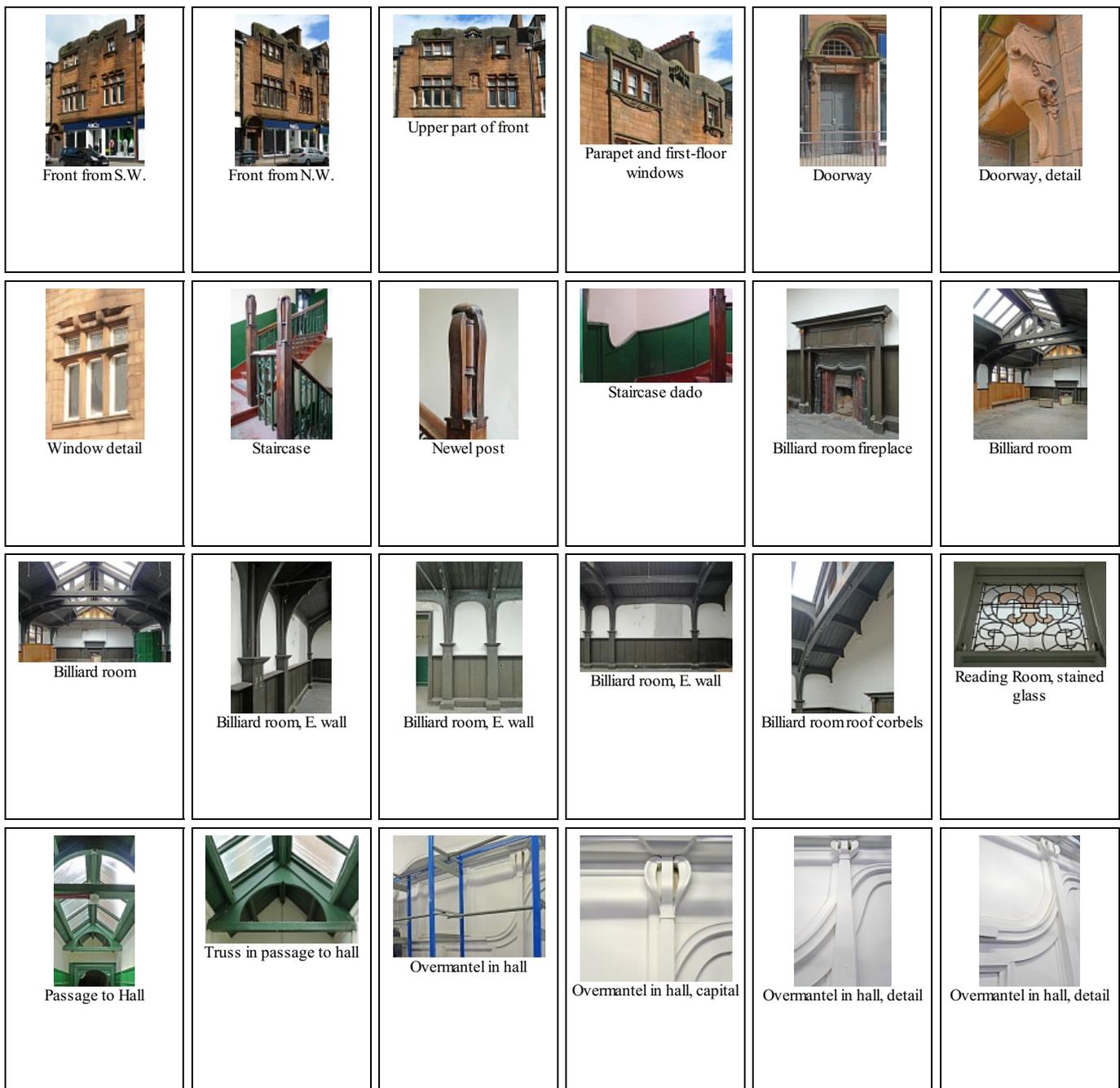
Payments (suppliers):

Name	Service	Payment date	Payment sum
George A. Sillars	'painter work.'	30 December [1895]	£121 19s 0½d

Measurer fee payment: £48 11s 0d ¹⁵ (10 January 1896)

Documents

Images



Bibliography

Published

- David Stark, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Co.*, Catrine, Ayrshire: Stenlake Publishing, 2004, p. 136
- Frank Arneil Walker and Fiona Sinclair, *Buildings of Scotland: Argyll and Bute*, London: Penguin, 2000, pp. 273–4
- Fiona J. Sinclair, 'Some observations on No. 40 Sinclair Street, Helensburgh', *Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society Newsletter*, 59, Summer 1992, pp. 5–7
- *Glasgow Herald*, 17 September 1894, p. 9
- *Glasgow Herald*, 11 April 1895, p. 4
- *Glasgow Herald*, 10 December 1895, p. 7
- *Helensburgh & Gareloch Times*, 19 September 1894, p. 3

Unpublished

- Lochgilhead, Argyll and Bute Council Archives: Helensburgh Dean of Guild Court Book 1, BH/9/1, p. 36

Notes:

- 1: *Glasgow Herald*, 10 December 1895, p. 7.

- 2: Lochgillhead, Argyll and Bute Council Archives: Helensburgh Dean of Guild Court Book 1, BH/9/1, p. 36.
- 3: *Glasgow Herald*, 17 September 1894, p. 9.
- 4: *Glasgow Herald*, 10 December 1895, p. 7.
- 5: *Glasgow Herald*, 10 December 1895, p. 7.
- 6: Gordon R. Urquhart, *A Notable Ornament: Lansdowne Church, an Icon of Victorian Glasgow*, Glasgow: Four Acres Charitable Trust and Glasgow City Heritage Trust, 2011, p. 62.
- 7: David Stark, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Co.*, Catrine, Ayrshire: Stenlake Publishing, 2004, pp. 132–3.
- 8: Fiona J. Sinclair, 'Some observations on No. 40 Sinclair Street, Helensburgh', *Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society Newsletter*, 59, Summer 1992, pp. 5–7; *Glasgow Herald*, 17 September 1894, p. 9.
- 9: *Glasgow Herald*, 17 September 1894, p. 9.
- 10: Mackintosh made sketches of Maybole Castle in 1895, but he would have known it earlier from the illustration in R. W. Billings, *The Baronial and Ecclesiastical Antiquities of Scotland*, Edinburgh: W. Blackwood & Sons, 4 vols, 1848–52, vol. 4, pl. 3.
- 11: *Architect*, 20 June 1890; Cyndy Manton, *Henry Wilson: Practical Idealist*, Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2009, pp. 13–16.
- 12: Fiona J. Sinclair, who saw the original drawings, detected the involvement of a number of different draughtsmen. She thought the constructional notes might have been added by Mackintosh (Fiona J. Sinclair, 'Some observations on No. 40 Sinclair Street, Helensburgh', *Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society Newsletter*, 59, Summer 1992, pp. 5–7).
- 13: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: John Honeyman & Keppie / Honeyman, Keppie & Mackintosh / Keppie Henderson cash book, 1889–1917, GLAHA 53079, p. 27.
- 14: *Glasgow Herald*, 11 April 1895, p. 4.
- 15: Fiona J. Sinclair, 'Some observations on No. 40 Sinclair Street, Helensburgh', *Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society Newsletter*, 59, Summer 1992, pp. 5–7; Charles Rennie Mackintosh, 'Untitled Paper on Architecture', in Pamela Robertson, ed., *Charles Rennie Mackintosh: The Architectural Papers*, Wendlebury, Oxon: White Cockade in association with the Hunterian Art Gallery, 1990, p. 186. Mackintosh nevertheless adopted this approach in his shop for Peter Macpherson at Comrie in 1903.
- 16: *Glasgow Herald*, 11 April 1895, p. 4.
- 17: *Glasgow Herald*, 10 December 1895, p. 7.
- 18: Quoted in Fiona J. Sinclair, 'Some observations on No. 40 Sinclair Street, Helensburgh', *Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society Newsletter*, 59, Summer 1992, pp. 5–7.
- 19: Alternative figure of £1538 5s 3d also recorded.
- 20: Alternative figure of £1720 15s 9d also recorded.
- 21: Alternative figure of £1725 15s 2d also recorded.
- 22: 'less 2½ p.c.'
- 23: 'returned with thanks.'
- 24: 'returned with thanks.'
- 25: Alternative figure of £1159 5s 8d also recorded.
- 26: 'returned with thanks.'
- 27: 'returned with thanks.'
- 28: Alternative figure of £195 10s 9d also recorded.
- 29: 'returned with thanks.'
- 30: Alternative figure of £112 15s 4d also recorded.
- 31: Alternative figure of £88 9s 8d also recorded.

32: 'including shop fittings.'

33: 'Total 97. 2. ½ kept of tradesmen.'

Mackintosh Architecture: Context, Making and Meaning

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