



# M339 Scheme for a block of studios and studio flats for the Arts League of Service

## Introduction

This unrealised proposal for a large block of studios and studio-flats was Mackintosh's biggest single architectural project during his years in London. It is associated with several other schemes, almost all unbuilt, for redeveloping the site of Old Cheyne House in Chelsea.

**Authorship:** There are numerous signed and unsigned drawings by Mackintosh, and his diary for 1920 provides a detailed record of his involvement.

**Status:** Unbuilt

**Grid reference:** TQ 27188 77789

## Chronology

### 1920

31 March: Mackintosh advises Ana Berry to make an offer of £1850 for the Cheyne House site, and is instructed by her 'to prepare a general scheme of studios & flats' for the 'Garden site of Old Cheyne House'. <sup>1</sup>

9 April: Mackintosh delivers a set of plans of 'Old Cheyne Studios' to Berry. <sup>2</sup>

24–30 April: Mackintosh obtains costings for building the studio block in reinforced concrete. <sup>3</sup>

22 June: Mackintosh records in his diary that W. E. Clifton, surveyor to the Glebe of Chelsea, 'still maintains that my elevations are not architectural enough and must be more elaborate.' <sup>4</sup>

30 June: Berry tells Mackintosh that the sum offered for the site has been accepted. <sup>5</sup>

13 December: Mackintosh records in his diary that 'Mr Clifton approved provisionally of proposed Studio Block in Old Cheyne House Garden.' <sup>6</sup>

20 December: Mackintosh records in his diary: 'Permission having been given by Archdeacon Bevan to proceed with the work Miss Berry returned one set of plans along with estimate and statement of accommodation. It was left to me to proceed with plans for Mystery House and get grant if possible.' <sup>7</sup>

### 1922

December: Mackintosh shows drawings of *Three Chelsea Studios* and the Arts League of Service block in an exhibition of contemporary British architecture at the Royal Institute of British Architects. <sup>8</sup>

## Description

### Site

This unrealised proposal for a large block of studios and studio-flats was Mackintosh's biggest single architectural project during his years in London. It is closely associated with several other schemes, mostly unbuilt: a second, linked studio block for the Arts League of Service; a studio-house for Arthur Cadogan Blunt; a studio-house for Harold Squire; and a building containing studios for Francis Derwent Wood. All were intended to stand on a site in Chelsea bounded by Glebe Place, Oakley Street and Upper Cheyne Row.

The site had been owned until his death in 1912 by the architect and collector Dr John Samuel Phené. <sup>1</sup> It had been the garden of Old Cheyne House, a dilapidated 18th-century dwelling that still stood at its W. end. At the opposite end, on the corner of Oakley Street and Upper Cheyne Row, was the eccentric Mystery House, and along the N. edge, facing Glebe Place, were some cottages. The site was offered for sale in July 1914, divided into 17 lots, but some or all of it was on the market again in October 1919, and it must have been around this time that it came to the attention of the Arts League of Service. <sup>2</sup>

### Client

The League was a voluntary organisation established in 1919, 'To bring the Arts into Everyday Life'. A dynamic South American woman, Ana Berry, was its

driving force, and among its associates were the Mackintoshes' friends, the painter J. D. Fergusson and his partner, the dancer Margaret Morris. One of its concerns was the shortage of artists' studios in post-First World War London, and at a meeting in May 1919, Berry outlined the League's ambitious plan to build a block of studios in Chelsea.<sup>3</sup> Two months later, a notice appeared in *The Times* inviting 'artists and writers who have been, or are being, ejected from their studios or houses' to contact the League.<sup>4</sup>

On 27 March 1920 Mackintosh was engaged to survey the Mystery House, 'with a view to the Arts League of Service acquiring the property for its purposes'.<sup>5</sup> This was perhaps the scheme reported in the *Athenaeum* on 9 April, 'by which one or two large houses should be bought [by the League] for the sole purpose of providing artists with accommodation'.<sup>6</sup> In the meantime, however, Berry was also pursuing the garden site. On 31 March she sought the advice of Mackintosh, who advised her to make an offer of £1850, and she instructed him 'to prepare a general scheme of studios & flats' for it.<sup>7</sup>

Under the title 'An Artist's Quarter', the intended building was described in the League's first *Bulletin*: 'It is ... proposed to build a block of residential studios which will be big enough, on any reasonable scale, for artists to work in, quiet enough for artists to think in, light enough for artists to see in, and cheap enough for artists to live in. These studio flats are to be let only to painters, sculptors, composers and men of letters.'<sup>8</sup> The provision of blocks of studios for rent can be traced back to the 1840s in London, and by the time of the League's proposal, such purpose-built studio blocks had been widespread for 50 years in suburbs popular with artists, including Chelsea.<sup>9</sup> The League's scheme was to be financed on a co-operative basis, with the tenants also being shareholders.<sup>10</sup> However, the *Bulletin* article expresses the hope that 'the public will actively support the scheme', presumably by investing in it financially.

## Development of design

By 9 April Mackintosh had produced an initial set of plans, and he continued to work on the project throughout 1920.<sup>11</sup> More than 40 of his drawings survive, but they provide an incomplete picture of the evolution of the scheme. There are no complete sets and none of the sheets is dated. It has therefore not been possible to provide a secure chronology for the evolution of the design. However, on stylistic grounds – inscriptions, paper size, subject – three related groups have been identified: a) M339-005 to M339-007; b) M339-009 to M339-013 and possibly M339-014 and M339-015; c) M339-016 to M339-026. The drawings show adjustments to the plan and overall size. M339-034 and M339-035 appear to show proposals for residential accommodation, separate to the studios, on the first and third floors, but there are no plans to confirm this. Four drawings – M339-027 to M339-029 and M339-005 – show projecting ground-floor bays at the north end of the garden elevation. M339-030 shows the extension of the set-back roof, a detail incorporated into the other surviving garden elevations; this drawing also shows a rooftop sketching platform, a feature not included in any of the other drawings. And M339-030 incorporates an additional floor.

A small group of drawings shows what is probably an early proposal, with the studio block lying parallel to Upper Cheyne Row, M339-001 to M339-004. It has a complex, non-rectilinear plan, with six studios and studio-flats on each floor, grouped in two triangular clusters around a pair of circular staircases enclosing lift shafts. The different axes of the studios are expressed externally, resulting in remarkably three-dimensional elevations. The central entrance is in a V-shaped recess and leads to a polygonal courtyard in the middle of the block. This startling design is unlike any other known work by Mackintosh. It may owe something to the butterfly-plan houses of Arts and Crafts architects such as E. S. Prior and Smith & Brewer, but its hard lines and strict symmetry – not to mention its four-storey bulk – give it an almost factory-like character, the very opposite of these precursors.<sup>12</sup> For whatever reason, this proposal was not pursued.

## Final design

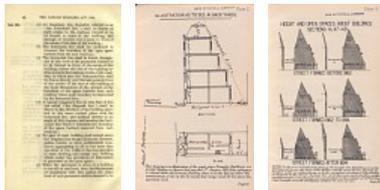
The scheme which Mackintosh went on to develop fully was illustrated in a rough, black and white perspective sketch, reproduced on the cover of the League's first *Bulletin*.<sup>13</sup> This sketch appears to be the 'Design for a Block of Studios in Chelsea' lent to the 1933 Mackintosh Memorial Exhibition at the McLellan Galleries, Glasgow (182a), by Desmond Chapman-Huston, and recorded in one of T. & R. Annan's photographs of the exhibition.



The *Bulletin* is undated, but internal evidence suggests it was produced in or soon after May 1920, to mark the first anniversary of the League's foundation. If this is so, Mackintosh had evidently settled on the main lines of his design by this early date. When he exhibited a carefully finished sheet of plans and elevations at the Royal Institute of British Architects in December 1922, he incorporated the little printed sketch from the *Bulletin* into the title of his drawing, like a logo.<sup>14</sup>

The proposed building occupies more or less the same footprint as Old Cheyne House. It is L-shaped, with a long wing facing E. over the garden and a shorter entrance wing facing S. on to Upper Cheyne Row. The short wing has four floors of studio-flats, with living accommodation on mezzanines overlooking the street (studio-flats of this type, consisting of a double-height studio with service rooms and a gallery-bedroom stacked beside it, had been the standard pattern for artists' accommodation in London for over 40 years).<sup>15</sup> These half-height storeys are lit by domestic-scaled windows in long, vertical rows. A drawing by Mackintosh inscribed 'Studio for Augustus John' (M339-040) seems to be an alternative treatment of part of this wing: presumably the painter Augustus John (1878–1961) was interested in taking a place in the proposed building. The other wing, also of four storeys, consists entirely of studios with huge windows, but Mackintosh also made drawings showing how these could be converted to include living accommodation.<sup>16</sup> Access to this wing was to be by external balconies at the rear.

One of the most striking features of the design is the long, steep slope of the N.-facing roofs, and the resulting asymmetrical E. gable. This is a direct outcome of trying to fit as much accommodation as possible on the site while still complying with the London Building Act of 1894. The Act imposed an 80 ft (24.38 m) limit on the height of new buildings, and in order to prevent the construction of dark and insanitary back courts it required upper floors to be progressively stepped back at the rear, at an angle of 63½°. <sup>17</sup> Mackintosh bought a copy of Banister Fletcher's *Building Acts of London* on 17 February 1920, and some of his drawings for the studio block are annotated to show how the design meets the requirements of the 1894 Act (M339-036 and M339-037).



The difference between the S. front with its vertical window strips and the E. front with its large studio windows recalls the two contrasting phases of Mackintosh's Glasgow School of Art. More generally, the sheer walls, the steep gables and the corbelled-out S.E. corner of the top floor hark back to the architecture of Scottish tenements and tower houses which had been such a powerful formative influence on him. There are parallels, too, with Salmon, Son & Gillespie's Lion Chambers of 1904–7, in Hope Street, Glasgow, another concrete building towering above smaller, older neighbours, and with artists' studios on its top floor. <sup>18</sup>

Besides these Scottish echoes, Mackintosh's design may reflect the influence of nearby 38 and 39 Cheyne Walk, designed around 1900 by C. R. Ashbee (1863–1942).



## Materials

The drawings do not give any information about intended materials, but Mackintosh's diary records that on 24 April 1920 he sought estimates from 'Somerville' for building in reinforced concrete. <sup>19</sup> This presumably refers to D. G. Somerville & Co. Ltd, of 120–2 Victoria Street, Westminster. Among their pre-War projects were the Mappin Terraces of 1913–4 at London Zoo: a concrete mountain designed by Belcher & Joass to provide a 'natural' environment for animals. <sup>20</sup> In a number of full-page advertisements in *Concrete & Constructional Engineering* during 1919, Somerville's had publicised their availability for work on post-War reconstruction projects, and had described a patent walling system which they claimed was more economical than traditional brick construction. <sup>21</sup>

Concrete was favoured by the Special (Building Control) Committee which had been set up by the London County Council in 1920 in response to the Housing (Additional Powers) Act of the previous year. <sup>22</sup> To further the all-important post-war goal of increasing the national housing stock, the Act prohibited any building operations that diverted materials and tradesmen away from housing schemes, and with bricks and bricklayers in short supply, the Committee urged the use of concrete where possible.

## Planning process

The plainness of the design did not find favour with the Glebe of Chelsea. <sup>23</sup> On 22 June 1920, Mackintosh noted in his diary that W. E. Clifton, the Glebe surveyor, thought the elevations were 'not architectural enough and must be more elaborate.' <sup>24</sup> However, on 13 December he recorded that Clifton had 'approved provisionally of my proposed Studio Block in Old Cheyne House Garden', and on 20 December that permission to proceed had been given by Archdeacon Bevan, the Rector of Chelsea. <sup>25</sup> Before the war, the Archdeacon had shown himself an architectural traditionalist when he refused consent for the demolition of the early 18th-century Argyll House at 211 King's Road 'to make way for modern flats'. <sup>26</sup> The proposed studio block would have towered over its two- and three-storey Georgian neighbours in Upper Cheyne Row and Glebe Place, and its gaunt rear elevation might even have been visible from the Archdeacon's garden in Church Street; so obtaining his approval was a significant achievement.



## Funding

It is uncertain why the building did not go ahead, but probably it proved difficult to finance. Mackintosh seems to have explored the possibility of grant aid: the Housing (Additional Powers) Act of 1919 made government subsidies available for private house-building, and in the first week of August 1920 he had a number of meetings about the Chelsea scheme with W. R. Davidge, Housing Commissioner for the London Area. <sup>27</sup> The drawings showing how some studios could be converted to residential use were perhaps intended to make the scheme eligible for subsidy. Mackintosh's diary entry for 20 December concludes: 'It was left to me to proceed with plans for Mystery House and get grant if possible', but there is no evidence that he succeeded in this. <sup>28</sup>

## Critical reception

In an exhibition of contemporary British architecture held at the Royal Institute of British Architects in December 1922, Mackintosh showed three related drawings framed together. Two sheets were elevations of three adjoining studio buildings in Glebe Place; the third combined plans of the Glebe Place studios with elevations and plans of the Arts League of Service block on the site of Cheyne House (M338-004, M338-005 and M339-043). <sup>29</sup> In the same exhibition he also showed what the catalogue described as 'A school library', which may have been the library of the Glasgow School of Art. <sup>30</sup> His work was

described briefly and unfavourably in a review of the exhibition by the architect and critic H. S. Goodhart-Rendel: 'Two exhibits sent by Mr C. R. Mackintosh looked curiously old-fashioned, and recalled to mind the illustrations which one finds in turning over the pages of early volumes of "The Studio"'.<sup>31</sup> Other reviews of the exhibition in the *Architect*, *Architect's Journal* and *Builder* did not mention Mackintosh at all.<sup>32</sup>

## People

### Clients:

- Arts League of Service
- Ana Berry

### Contractors:

- D. G. Somerville & Co. Ltd

## 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 M339 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 M339 has been extracted from the job books:

## Documents



Perspective a block of studios and studio flats, from cover of Bulletin of the Arts League of Service, n.d.

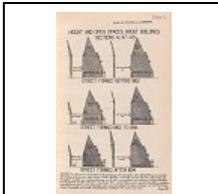


Plate 5 from The London Building Acts(1894), showing permitted heights of buildings and setting-back of upper floors. 1014

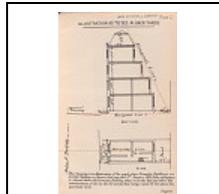


Plate 2 from The London Building Acts(1894), showing permitted heights of buildings and setting-back of upper floors. 1014



The London Building Acts(1894), p. 42, showing permitted heights of buildings and setting-back of upper floors. 1014

## Images

## Bibliography

### Published

- Alan Crawford, 'Lost and found: architectural projects after Glasgow', in Pamela Robertson, ed., *C. R. Mackintosh: The Chelsea Years, 1915–1923*, exhibition catalogue, Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow, 1994, pp. 11–13
- Alan Crawford, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1995, pp. 181–4
- Thomas Howarth, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2nd edn, 1977, pp. 210–12
- Gavin Stamp, 'The London Years', in Wendy Kaplan, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh*, New York and London: Abbeville Press, 1996, pp. 201–224
- Pamela Reekie, 'The Chelsea Years', *Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society Newsletter*, 20, Autumn 1978
- *Bulletin of the Arts League of Service*, [1920]

### Unpublished

- Hiroaki Kimura, 'Charles Rennie Mackintosh: Architectural Drawings', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 1982, pp. 63–4
- Hunterian, University of Glasgow: Mackintosh's diary for 1920, GLAHA 52408

## Notes:

- 1: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: Mackintosh's diary for 1920, GLAHA 52408.
- 2: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: Mackintosh's diary for 1920, GLAHA 52408.
- 3: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: Mackintosh's diary for 1920, GLAHA 52408.
- 4: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: Mackintosh's diary for 1920, GLAHA 52408.
- 5: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: Mackintosh's diary for 1920, GLAHA 52408.
- 6: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: Mackintosh's diary for 1920, GLAHA 52408.
- 7: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: Mackintosh's diary for 1920, GLAHA 52408.
- 8: *Architectural Review*, 53, January 1923, pp. 26–31.
- 9: Alan Crawford, 'Lost and found: architectural projects after Glasgow', in Pamela Robertson, ed., *C. R. Mackintosh: The Chelsea Years, 1915–1923*, exhibition catalogue, Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow, 1994, pp. 8–9.
- 10: Alan Crawford, 'Lost and found: architectural projects after Glasgow', in Pamela Robertson, ed., *C. R. Mackintosh: The Chelsea Years, 1915–1923*, exhibition catalogue, Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow, 1994, pp. 8–9. When the sale was advertised in *The Times*, 4 July 1914, p. 20, Cheyne House was described as 'an old fashioned Residence in sylvan surroundings, to be restored for occupation'.
- 11: Eleanor Elder, *Travelling Players: The Story of the Arts League of Service*, London: Frederick Muller, 1939, p. 5.
- 12: *The Times*, 16 July 1919, p. 9.
- 13: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: Mackintosh's diary for 1920, GLAHA 52408.
- 14: *Athenaeum*, no. 4693, 9 April 1920, pp. 469–70.
- 15: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: Mackintosh's diary for 1920, GLAHA 52408.
- 16: *Bulletin of the Arts League of Service*, no date, pp. 1–3. There is a copy in the National Art Library, PP.18.D.
- 17: Giles Walkley, *Artists' Houses in London 1764–1914*, Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1994, ch. 8.
- 18: Thomas Howarth, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2nd edn, 1977, p. 211.
- 19: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: Mackintosh's diary for 1920, GLAHA 52408.
- 20: For instance Prior's The Barn, Exmouth, Devon (1895) and Voewood, Holt, Norfolk (1904), and Smith & Brewer's The Sundial, Holnwood, Surrey (1903). Papillon Hall, Leicestershire (1903), by Lutyens, was another house of similar plan.
- 21: *Bulletin of the Arts League of Service*, no date. There is a copy in the National Art Library, PP.18.D.
- 22: London, British Museum: Department of Prints and Drawings, 1981,1212.24.
- 23: Giles Walkley, *Artists' Houses in London 1764–1914*, Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1994, ch. 8.
- 24: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: GLAHA 41604 (M339-035), GLAHA 41609 M339-021); another drawing, GLAHA 41625 (M339-041), has no identifying inscription, but appears to be a design for providing a bedroom, kitchen and bathroom within a single studio.
- 25: Banister Fletcher, *The London Building Acts*, 5th edn, London: B. T. Batsford, 1914, pp. 40–53.
- 26: Elizabeth Williamson, Anne Riches and Malcolm Higgs, *Buildings of Scotland: Glasgow*, London: Penguin, 1990, pp. 228–9.
- 27: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: Mackintosh's diary for 1920, GLAHA 52408.
- 28: Bridget Cherry and Nikolaus Pevsner, *London 3: North West*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002, p. 628.
- 29: *Concrete & Constructional Engineering*, January 1919, p. vii, and February 1919, p. vii.
- 30: London Metropolitan Archives: London County Council minutes, 10 February 1920.
- 31: A glebe is church property. The ground landlord of the site was the Rector of Chelsea.
- 32: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: Mackintosh's diary for 1920, GLAHA 52408.

- 33:** The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: Mackintosh's diary for 1920, GLAHA 52408.
- 34:** 'Argyll House, No. 211, King's Road', Survey of London: vol. 4: Chelsea, pt II (1913), pp. 82–5, [www.british-history.ac.uk](http://www.british-history.ac.uk) [accessed: 6 June 2012].
- 35:** *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, 65, 26 June 1920, pp. 406–7; 66, 31 July 1920, p. 432; The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: Mackintosh's diary for 1920, GLAHA 52408.
- 36:** The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: Mackintosh's diary for 1920, GLAHA 52408.
- 37:** London, Royal Institute of British Architects: *Exhibition of Contemporary British Architecture*, 1–22 December 1922 (293). These three drawings are now in the British Museum: Department of Prints and Drawings, 1981,1212.22, 1981,1212.23 and 1981,1212.24.
- 38:** London, Royal Institute of British Architects: *Exhibition of Contemporary British Architecture*, 1–22 December 1922 (256).
- 39:** *Architectural Review*, 53, January 1923, p. 31.
- 40:** *Architect*, 8 December 1922, pp. 407–8; *Architect's Journal*, 56, 13 December 1922, pp. 821–9; and *Builder*, 123, 8 December 1922, p. 863.

## 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](#)