

M038 Competition design for Workmen's dwellings, High Street and Rottenrow

Introduction

Mackintosh prepared an unsuccessful competition design for Glasgow City Improvement Trust Workmen's Dwellings at High Street and Rottenrow, Glasgow. The design was submitted under the alias 'Scottish Baronial'.

Authorship: The drawings are Mackintosh's work, inscribed with annotations in his hand.

Status: Unbuilt

Grid reference: NS 6007 6539 (proposed location)

Chronology

1890

14 October: A special sub-committee of the Glasgow City Improvement Trustees is remitted to arrange prizes for 'Competitive Designs for Workmen's Dwellings'. The designs and models of the successful entry are to be exhibited at the East End Industrial Exhibition. The closing date is 31 December 1890. ¹

28 October: The sub-committee draws up the conditions of the competition. ²

10 December: The Trustees meet with a deputation from the Glasgow Institute of Architects, who express dissatisfaction over the sums offered as prize money and the absence of assurance that the winner would be selected as architect for the building work. The Trustees decide to make only one alteration to the conditions, extending the closing date from 31 December 1890 to 31 January 1891. ³

26 December: The dispute between the Trustees and Glasgow Institute of Architects over the conditions of the competition is reported in the *British Architect*. ⁴

1891

31 January: Competition closing date. ⁵

9 February: The Trustees resolve to invite John Honeyman to adjudicate the competition. ⁶

10 February: Mackintosh presents a paper on 'Scotch Baronial Architecture' to the Glasgow Architectural Association. ⁷

12 February: Honeyman declines the invitation to adjudicate the competition. ⁸

By 4 March: Glasgow architect Robert A. Bryden appointed adjudicator. ⁹

18 March: The results of Bryden's adjudication are reported to the Trustees: Glasgow architects H. & D. Barclay are placed first; Henry Ross, architect and surveyor of Accrington, Lancashire, second. The Trustees resolve to award the prizes accordingly. Bryden recommends that all entries received should be exhibited at the East End Industrial Exhibition. ¹⁰

17 April: The special sub-committee agrees to build the first-prize winning design while allowing for 'further deliberation of the subject'. ¹¹

5 August: Despite having estimates prepared for building the successful competition design for the workmen's dwellings, the Trustees remain divided, and decide to 'expose the ground in question to public sale ... instead of themselves proceeding to erecting buildings thereon'. ¹²

1892

14 August: The Town Council Water Works Commissioners agree to approach the City Improvement Trust with a view to purchasing the land at the corner of High Street and Rottenrow for a new hydraulic pumping station for high pressure water supply and ancillary buildings. ¹³

31 August: The Trustees agree to sell the land to the Water Works Commissioners. ¹⁴

1893-5

Hydraulic pumping station constructed on site. ¹⁵

Description

Competition

This design for a complex of sanitary working-class housing was Mackintosh's unsuccessful entry in an architectural competition held by the Glasgow City Improvement Trust in 1890–1. It is known only through a set of drawings – unsigned, but heavily annotated in Mackintosh's hand – which remained in his possession until his death.

The Glasgow City Improvement Trust was established under the Glasgow Police Act 1866 to improve the substandard dwellings and sanitation in the city. The Police Act regulated the dimensions of tenement buildings and the accommodation they provided. ¹ The work of the Trust focussed on the medieval core of the city around the High Street, where living conditions were particularly bad. It demolished woefully inadequate subdivided tenements and the accumulation of dwellings in their closes and 'backlands' and, along with speculative developers, constructed new and better flats for lease to the unskilled and skilled working-class. ²

On 20 November 1890, the Improvement Trustees advertised for 'Competitive Designs for Workmen's Dwellings'. ³ The site was on the W. side of the High Street at the corner of Rottenrow, with frontages to both streets, covering an area of 3975 square yards (3324 square m). The Trustees sought designs which showed 'alternatively a) how the ground could be utilised by the erection on part thereof of a building capable of being used as a family-house for the accommodation of men, or of women, with children but who are so circumstanced as not to be able to look after them, and by the erection on the remainder of the ground of tenements of a superior kind for the working classes containing one room, and one room and kitchen houses; and b) how the whole ground could be utilised by the erection thereon of tenements of the description above mentioned'. Awards of £50 and £25 were to be made to the designs placed first and second. ⁴ The closing date was 31 December 1890. ⁵

The conditions met with objections from the Glasgow Institute of Architects. Representatives of the Institute, who met with the Improvement Trustees in December 1890, considered the first and second premiums insufficient, and were concerned that no provision had been made to employ the winner as architect for the construction of the buildings. The deputation also recommended extending the closing date to 31 January 1891. ⁶ The disagreement and its resolution were reported in the *British Architect*. The Trustees ultimately made no alterations to the conditions, but extended the closing date and assured them that the winner would be appointed architect for the building, should it proceed. ⁷

Unusually, an adjudicator was not appointed until after the closing date. In February 1891 John Honeyman was invited to assess the entries, but declined. ⁸ By March, Glasgow architect Robert Bryden had been appointed, and at the Trustees' meeting on 18 March his assessment was reported. Bryden awarded first place to a scheme by Glasgow architects H. & D. Barclay and second place to a Henry Ross, architect and surveyor, of Accrington, Lancashire. The Trustees resolved that the Barclays' design should be built and that 'the whole of the designs sent in should be exhibited at the East End Industrial Exhibition.' ⁹

No newspaper reports on the East End Industrial Exhibition included reviews of the designs entered in the competition, and thus no details of the two prize-winning schemes or any of the other entries are known. Ultimately, the Barclays' scheme was not built. Internal divisions among the Improvement Trustees appear to have led in August 1891 to the decision to sell the land on the High Street and Rottenrow to the Water Works Commissioners, who in 1893–5 built a hydraulic pumping station on it for a new high-pressure water supply. ¹⁰

Mackintosh's design

Apart from student work, this appears to be Mackintosh's earliest competition entry. As was usual for architectural competitions of the period, it was submitted anonymously. Mackintosh used the alias 'Scottish Baronial'. Although it does incorporate elements of 16th- and 17th-century Scottish architecture, such as crow-stepped gables and dormers, there are no conical-roofed towers or corbelled turrets, due no doubt to the need for economy. Mackintosh's choice of style reflects his wider enthusiasm for Scottish Baronial architecture at the time. ¹¹ In February 1891, he gave his first public lecture, on 'Scotch Baronial Architecture', to the Glasgow Architectural Association. ¹² The paper gave a survey of the style, drawing heavily on the recently-published volumes of David MacGibbon and Thomas Ross's *The Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland from the Twelfth to the Eighteenth Century*, and was illustrated by Mackintosh 'in the form of pencil drawings, watercolours and photographs, not a few the work of his own hands'. ¹³

The tenement design combines two types of blocks, labelled A and B on the drawings. They vary in internal layout, but both provide the two types of flat required by the competition conditions: a room-and-kitchen flat with 'bed closet' (a very small, separate space) and conventional bed presses (cupboards with built-in beds); and a single-room flat with 'bed closet' only. Each floor has two or three flats around a common staircase. The arrangement of the four-storey blocks takes account of the slope of the High Street: the back courts behind were to be levelled and covered with 'granolithic', an expense Mackintosh included in the estimated costs for his scheme which appear on his plan. In the attic of each block is a washhouse containing bathroom and drying room with boilers to heat water for laundry and bathing.

Rather than the 'family-house' outlined in the competition conditions, Mackintosh provided what he called an 'old people's home' at the corner of the two streets. ¹⁴ Like the tenements, the home has four storeys. The identical, regularly disposed windows on each floor of the High Street elevation hint at the functional spaces inside, and differentiate the building from the adjacent tenements. Inside, communal dining, day and work rooms, as well as kitchens and bathing facilities, are on the ground and first floors. Private single and double bedrooms are largely located on the second and third floors, at a distance from the communal spaces, with four double rooms also provided on the first floor.

Mackintosh's design acknowledged the style and scale of buildings which then existed close to the proposed site, such as 18th-century tenements with crow-step gables and the 15th-century Provand's Lordship. Mackintosh also seems to have been influenced by Sydney Mitchell's design for Well Court, a group of four working-class tenements (1883–4) beside the Water of Leith, in Edinburgh. These had been illustrated in the *British Architect* in August 1889. ¹⁵ Although the High Street site made it impossible to recreate Mitchell's 'romantic courtyard grouping', ¹⁶ the scale of Mackintosh's tenements is similar, and they

echo a number of details from the Edinburgh scheme, such as the crow-stepped gables, variety of dormer windows, the arrangement of pairs and single windows corresponding to the interior layout, and relieving arches over windows. Buildings such as Mitchell's probably inspired Mackintosh's conclusion to his lecture to the Glasgow Architectural Association: 'From some recent buildings which have been erected it is clearly evident that this style is coming to life again and I only hope that it will not be strangled in its infancy by indiscriminating and unsympathetic people who copy the ancient examples without trying to make the style conform to modern requirements'.¹⁷

People

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 M038 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 M038 has been extracted from the job books:

Documents

Images

Bibliography

Published

- David Walker, 'The Early Works of Charles Rennie Mackintosh', in Nikolaus Pevsner and J. M. Richards, eds, *The Anti-Rationalists*, London: Architectural Press, 1973, pp. 116–35
- Andrew McLaren Young, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868–1928): Architecture, Design and Painting*, exhibition catalogue, Edinburgh: Edinburgh Festival Society and Scottish Arts Council, 1968, p. 31

Unpublished

- Hiroaki Kimura, 'Charles Rennie Mackintosh: Architectural Drawings Catalogue and Design Analytical Catalogue', University of Glasgow: unpublished PhD thesis, 1982, pp. 20, 75–6
- Glasgow City Archives Collection: Glasgow Town Council, Trustees under 'The Glasgow Improvements Act, 1866' and committees' minutes, C1/3/18; C1/3/19

Notes:

- 1: Glasgow City Archives Collection: Glasgow Town Council, Trustees under 'The Glasgow Improvements Act, 1866' and committees' minutes, C1/3/18, 14 October 1890; 10 December 1890.
- 2: Glasgow City Archives Collection: Glasgow Town Council, Trustees under 'The Glasgow Improvements Act, 1866' and committees' minutes, C1/3/18, 28 October 1890.
- 3: Glasgow City Archives Collection: Glasgow Town Council, Trustees under 'The Glasgow Improvements Act, 1866' and committees' minutes, C1/3/18, 10 December 1890; 24 December 1890.
- 4: *British Architect*, 34, 26 December 1890, p. 479.
- 5: Glasgow City Archives Collection: Glasgow Town Council, Trustees under 'The Glasgow Improvements Act, 1866' and committees' minutes, C1/3/18, 24 December 1890.
- 6: Glasgow City Archives Collection: Glasgow Town Council, Trustees under 'The Glasgow Improvements Act, 1866' and committees' minutes, C1/3/18, 21 January 1891.

- 7: Frank Arneil Walker, 'Scottish Baronial Architecture', in Pamela Robertson, ed., *Charles Rennie Mackintosh: The Architectural Papers*, Wendlebury, Oxon: White Cockade in association with the Hunterian Art Gallery, 1990, pp. 28–63.
- 8: Glasgow City Archives Collection: Glasgow Town Council, Trustees under 'The Glasgow Improvements Act, 1866' and committees' minutes, C1/3/18, 12 February 1891.
- 9: Glasgow City Archives Collection: Glasgow Town Council, Trustees under 'The Glasgow Improvements Act, 1866' and committees' minutes, C1/3/18, 4 March 1891.
- 10: A letter from Bryden dated 10 March 1891 read at committee meeting on 18 March. Glasgow City Archives Collection: Glasgow Town Council, Trustees under 'The Glasgow Improvements Act, 1866' and committees' minutes, C1/3/18, 18 March 1891.
- 11: Glasgow City Archives Collection: Glasgow Town Council, Trustees under 'The Glasgow Improvements Act, 1866' and committees' minutes, C1/3/18, 17 April 1891.
- 12: Glasgow City Archives Collection: Glasgow Town Council, Trustees under 'The Glasgow Improvements Act, 1866' and committees' minutes, C1/3/18, 5 August 1891.
- 13: Glasgow City Archives Collection: Glasgow Town Council, Trustees under 'The Glasgow Improvements Act, 1866' and committees' minutes, C1/3/19, 14 August 1892.
- 14: Glasgow City Archives Collection: Glasgow Town Council, Trustees under 'The Glasgow Improvements Act, 1866' and committees' minutes, C1/3/19, 31 August 1892.
- 15: John R. Hume, *Industrial Archaeology of Glasgow*, Glasgow and London: Blackie, 1974, gazetteer, no. G 51, p. 211.
- 16: Frank Worsdall, *The Tenement: A Way of Life*, Edinburgh: Chambers, 1979, pp. 32, 95.
- 17: Miles Horsey, *Tenements and Towers: Glasgow Working-Class Housing 1890–1990*, Edinburgh: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Scotland, 1990, pp. 1–10.
- 18: Date noted by Hiroaki Kimura, 'Charles Rennie Mackintosh: Architectural Drawings Catalogue and Design Analytical Catalogue', University of Glasgow: unpublished PhD thesis, 1982, p. 76. Original source not found.
- 19: Glasgow City Archives Collection: Glasgow Town Council, Trustees under 'The Glasgow Improvements Act, 1866' and committees' minutes, C1/3/18, 28 October 1890.
- 20: Glasgow City Archives Collection: Glasgow Town Council, Trustees under 'The Glasgow Improvements Act, 1866' and committees' minutes, C1/3/18, 10 December 1890.
- 21: Glasgow City Archives Collection: Glasgow Town Council, Trustees under 'The Glasgow Improvements Act, 1866' and committees' minutes, C1/3/18, 10 December 1890.
- 22: *British Architect*, 34, 26 December 1890, p. 479; Glasgow City Archives Collection: Glasgow Town Council, Trustees under 'The Glasgow Improvements Act, 1866' and committees' minutes, C1/3/18, 10 December 1890.
- 23: Glasgow City Archives Collection: Glasgow Town Council, Trustees under 'The Glasgow Improvements Act, 1866' and committees' minutes, C1/3/18, 12 February 1891.
- 24: Glasgow City Archives Collection: Glasgow Town Council, Trustees under 'The Glasgow Improvements Act, 1866' and committees' minutes, C1/3/18, 4 March 1891; 18 March 1891.
- 25: Glasgow City Archives Collection: Glasgow Town Council, Trustees under 'The Glasgow Improvements Act, 1866' and committees' minutes, C1/3/18, 5 August 1891; C1/3/19, 14 August 1892; C1/3/19, 31 August 1892; John R. Hume, *Industrial Archaeology of Glasgow*, Glasgow and London: Blackie, 1974, gazetteer no. G 51, p. 211.
- 26: David Walker, 'The Early Works of Charles Rennie Mackintosh', Nikolaus Pevsner and J. M. Richards, eds., *The Anti-Rationalists*, London: Architectural Press, 1973, p. 117; Hiroaki Kimura, 'Charles Rennie Mackintosh: Architectural Drawings Catalogue and Design Analytical Catalogue', University of Glasgow: unpublished PhD thesis, 1982, pp. 20, 75–6.
- 27: Frank A. Walker, 'Scotch Baronial Architecture' in Pamela Robertson, ed., *Charles Rennie Mackintosh: The Architectural Papers*, Wendlebury, Oxon: White Cockade in association with the Hunterian Art Gallery, 1990, pp. 29–63; *British Architect*, 35, 20 February 1891, pp. 151–2. The *British Architect* in fact reported the title of the paper as 'Scottish Baronial' matching Mackintosh's competition alias.
- 28: *British Architect*, 35, 20 February 1891, p. 152. Stewart Cruden, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society Newsletter*, 15, 1977, pp. 5–8.
- 29: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: GLAHA 52499 (M038-001); GLAHA 52503 (M038-005).
- 30: David Walker, 'The Early Works of Charles Rennie Mackintosh', in Nikolaus Pevsner and J. M. Richards, eds, *The Anti-Rationalists*, London: Architectural Press, 1973, p. 117; *British Architect*, 32, 23 August 1889, pp. 127, 129–31.

31: David Walker, 'The Early Works of Charles Rennie Mackintosh', in Nikolaus Pevsner and J. M. Richards, eds, *The Anti-Rationalists*, London: Architectural Press, 1973, p. 117.

32: Charles Rennie Mackintosh in 'Scotch Baronial Architecture', in Pamela Robertson, ed., *Charles Rennie Mackintosh: The Architectural Papers*, Wendlebury, Oxon: White Cockade in association with the Hunterian Art Gallery, 1990, p. 63.

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](#)