

M054 Student design for a Chapter House

Introduction

This was Mackintosh's unsuccessful entry in the 1892 competition for the Soane Medallion, a student prize awarded annually by the Royal Institute of British Architects. It shows the influence of his study trip to Italy in the late spring and early summer of 1891.

Authorship: The design was published under Mackintosh's name in 1892.

Status: Unbuilt

Chronology

1891

28 May: Pamphlet published, containing 'programmes and conditions' for prizes and studentships offered in 1891–2 by the Royal Institute of British Architects. This is presumably where the subject for the Soane Medallion competition was announced. ¹

July/August: Mackintosh returns from Italy to Glasgow. ²

23 December: Closing date for Soane Medallion competition. ³

1892

15 January: Mackintosh's chapter house design exhibited along with other Soane Medallion competition entries at the Royal Institute of British Architects, 9 Conduit Street, London. ⁴

18 January: Results of Soane Medallion competition to be announced. ⁵

4 March: Mackintosh's chapter house design published in *British Architect*. ⁶

July: Mackintosh's chapter house design awarded gold medal in National Competition of Schools of Science and Art at South Kensington. ⁷

Description

Background

This was Mackintosh's entry in the 1892 competition for the Soane Medallion, a student prize awarded annually by the Royal Institute of British Architects, open to British subjects under the age of 30. ¹ Contestants had to submit a design for a set subject, in this case a cathedral chapter house, the prize being a travel grant of £100. ² This was twice the sum offered the previous year, and was supposed to allow six months' travel.

Mackintosh evidently prepared his submission between returning from Italy in late July or early August 1891, following his tenure of the Alexander Thomson Memorial Studentship, and the closing date of 23 December 1891. ³ He did not win, but his design attracted attention in the architectural press. ⁴ At the same time he submitted a selection of drawings from his Italian journey for the Institute's Pugin Travelling Studentship, but again he was unsuccessful. ⁵ Later in 1892, he sent the chapter house drawings to South Kensington for the National Competition of Schools of Science and Art, where they earned him a gold medal, one of only eight awarded among 3217 competitors. ⁶

Mackintosh's original drawings are lost, but his plans, section and elevation were reproduced in the *British Architect*. ⁷ There is no record of his exterior perspective (which was praised by Aston Webb: see below), or of the full-size details that the terms of the competition also required. ⁸



Sources and style

A chapter house is a room attached to a monastery, cathedral or other large church, in which meetings of the clergy are held. In English medieval architecture it is often circular or polygonal, and virtually free-standing. The same pattern is found in Scottish buildings such as Elgin Cathedral, where Mackintosh had sketched one of the chapter house windows in 1889. ⁹ Mackintosh adopted this English/Scottish medieval pattern for his chapter house, but clothed it in classical dress, largely based on the buildings he had studied in Italy. He seems to have turned for inspiration to baptisteries, the closest parallel in Italian architecture to free-standing chapter houses of the Elgin type, built to a centralised plan. His design has close-set arcades high up to screen the clerestory windows, recalling the octagonal baptisteries at Bergamo and Cremona: he had visited both towns, and recorded in his diary that the Cremona baptistry was 'very good'. ¹⁰ However, his roof is in the form of a dome, a feature usually reserved in Italian architecture for churches or chapels. Its slightly pointed shape resembles Filippo Brunelleschi's famous 15th-century dome for Florence cathedral, another building Mackintosh had examined on his Italian tour. ¹¹ The only conspicuously non-Italian features are the very elongated gables around the base of the dome, which are closer to 16th-century French or Flemish architecture.

Inside, the seating is modelled on the choir stalls Mackintosh had particularly admired in Italy, in the cathedrals at Siena and Pisa for example, and in the church of San Zeno at Verona. ¹² The chapter house stalls wrap around the inside wall just as they do in churches such as San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice, where they follow the curve of the apse. ¹³ The decorative details – abundant figure sculpture, mosaics and frescoes on walls and ceiling, and a geometrically patterned floor of inlaid marble – reflect the seductive effect on the young Mackintosh of his first direct encounter with the richness of Italian architecture. The source of the candelabra has been identified as Annibale Fontana's work at the Certosa di Pavia. ¹⁴

Critical reception

Aston Webb, Honorary Secretary of the Royal Institute of British Architects, reviewed the competition entries on 25 January 1892. He described Mackintosh's design (submitted anonymously, like all the drawings, under the alias 'Griffin') as: 'A clever Renaissance design, octagonal on plan, covered internally with a plain vault, with suggested decoration most admirably shown. A very well-tinted perspective shows the exterior, but the parapet and niches externally appear perhaps rather restless, and the detail hardly comes up to the rest of the work.' ¹⁵

The *British Architect* also found fault with the parapet: 'The attenuated form of the sculptured dormers round the dome ... very much detracts from the effect, though in some ways the design is very skilfully worked out.' ¹⁶ In March, however, the same journal published Mackintosh's 'clever drawings' with a more unequivocal endorsement, describing his entry as 'One of the most striking designs' in the competition. ¹⁷ When it was awarded a gold medal in the National Competition of Schools of Science and Art, the *British Architect* reported that the examiners thought it showed 'considerable artistic power', though it was 'a pity the author should have copied his candelabra directly from an ancient example'. ¹⁸

People

Clients:

-

Contractors:

-

Other:

-

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 M054 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 M054 has been extracted from the job books:

Job book: Page: NaN

Client:

Tenders:

Contractor	Type	Address	Date	Value	Accepted

Payments (trades):

Name	Type	Payment out sum
		Payment date:

Payments (suppliers):

Name	Service	Payment date	Payment sum

Measurer fee payment: ()

Total cost:

Documents

Images

Bibliography

Published

- Alan Crawford, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1995, pp. 19–20
- Thomas Howarth, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2nd edn, 1977, pp. 13–15
- Robert Macleod, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh: Architect and Artist*, London: Collins, 1983, pp. 30–31
- Pamela Robertson, 'Mackintosh and Italy', in Pamela Robertson, ed., *Charles Rennie Mackintosh: The Architectural Papers*, Wendlebury, Oxon: White Cockade in association with the Hunterian Art Gallery, 1990, pp. 82–4
- *British Architect*, 37, 22 January 1892, p. 59; 4 March 1892, p. 173
- *British Architect*, 38, 29 July 1892, p. 74
- *Journal of Proceedings of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, 9, 28 January 1892, pp. 140–2

Unpublished

- Hiroaki Kimura, 'Charles Rennie Mackintosh: Architectural Drawings', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 1982, p. 21

Notes:

- 1: *Journal of Proceedings of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, 7, 11 June 1891, pp. 337–8.
- 2: 'Appendix 1: Correspondence relating to the Italian Tour', in Pamela Robertson, ed., *Charles Rennie Mackintosh: The Architectural Papers*, Wendlebury, Oxon: White Cockade in association with the Hunterian Art Gallery, 1990, p. 231.
- 3: *British Architect*, 36, 18 December 1891, p. 449.
- 4: *British Architect*, 37, 15 January 1892, p. 40.
- 5: *British Architect*, 37, 15 January 1892, p. 40.
- 6: *British Architect*, 37, 4 March 1892, p. 173 and illustration.
- 7: *British Architect*, 38, 29 July 1892, p. 75.
- 8: For a history of the Soane Medallion, see *Journal of Proceedings of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, 5 February 1891, pp. 150–2.
- 9: *Journal of Proceedings of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, 7, 7 May 1891, p. 297; 7, 11 June 1891, pp. 337–8.

- 10:** *British Architect*, 36, 18 December 1891, p. 449.
- 11:** *British Architect*, 37, 22 January 1892, p. 59.
- 12:** *British Architect*, 37, 22 January 1892, p. 59.
- 13:** *British Architect*, 38, 29 July 1892, p. 75. The examiners were Professor Aitchison, T. G. Jackson and J. J. Stevenson.
- 14:** *British Architect*, 37, 4 March 1892, p. 173.
- 15:** *Journal of Proceedings of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, 9, 28 January 1892, p. 140.
- 16:** The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: GLAHA 41418.
- 17:** Charles Rennie Mackintosh, 'Diary of a Tour in Italy', in Pamela Robertson, ed., *Charles Rennie Mackintosh: The Architectural Papers*, Wendlebury, Oxon: White Cockade in association with the Hunterian Art Gallery, 1990, pp. 105–6. George Rawson suggests that Como cathedral, which Mackintosh visited and sketched on 26 June 1891, influenced the chapter house design: its transepts end in semi-octagonal domed apses, with triplets of round-arched windows: Charles Rennie Mackintosh, *North Italian Sketchbook*, www.mackintoshsketchbook.net [accessed 6 March 2013].
- 18:** Charles Rennie Mackintosh, 'A Tour in Italy', in Pamela Robertson, ed., *Charles Rennie Mackintosh: The Architectural Papers*, Wendlebury, Oxon: White Cockade in association with the Hunterian Art Gallery, 1990, p. 116.
- 19:** Charles Rennie Mackintosh, 'Diary of a Tour in Italy', in Pamela Robertson, ed., *Charles Rennie Mackintosh: The Architectural Papers*, Wendlebury, Oxon: White Cockade in association with the Hunterian Art Gallery, 1990, pp. 100, 102, 105.
- 20:** Mackintosh described visiting San Giorgio Maggiore in the lecture he gave in Glasgow on his return from Italy: Charles Rennie Mackintosh, 'A Tour in Italy', in Pamela Robertson, ed., *Charles Rennie Mackintosh: The Architectural Papers*, Wendlebury, Oxon: White Cockade in association with the Hunterian Art Gallery, 1990, p. 119.
- 21:** Pamela Robertson, 'Mackintosh and Italy', in Pamela Robertson, ed., *Charles Rennie Mackintosh: The Architectural Papers*, Wendlebury, Oxon: White Cockade in association with the Hunterian Art Gallery, 1990, p. 82.
- 22:** *Journal of Proceedings of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, 9, 28 January 1892, p. 142.
- 23:** *British Architect*, 37, 22 January 1892, p. 59.
- 24:** *British Architect*, 37, 4 March 1892, p. 173.
- 25:** *British Architect*, 38, 29 July 1892, p. 74.

Mackintosh Architecture: Context, Making and Meaning

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