



M102 Competition design for Royal Insurance Company offices

Introduction

This was John Honeyman & Keppie's unsuccessful entry in the competition for new offices for the Royal Insurance Company in central Glasgow. The style is baroque, but much of the detailing is unorthodox.

Authorship: The design has many features in common with John Honeyman & Keppie's Glasgow Herald buildings and Martyrs Public School, works of roughly the same date for which Mackintosh was probably largely responsible. It is therefore likely that he worked on the Royal Insurance design too. When the design was included in the architecture section of the Glasgow International Exhibition in 1901 (1), the catalogue named the architects as 'John Honeyman, R. S. A.; John Keppie, I. A.; Chas. R. Macintosh [sic]'.

Alternative addresses: Royal Bank Place

Status: Unbuilt

Grid reference: NS 5903 6533

Chronology

1894

John Honeyman & Keppie's design presumably made during latter part of this year, immediately before Alexander McGibbon's perspective drawing.

1895

4 February: Payment made by John Honeyman & Keppie to Alexander McGibbon for perspective drawing. ¹

19 February: John Honeyman & Keppie receive premium of £50 for their design. ²

Spring: McGibbon's perspective shown at Royal Scottish Academy (501). ³

Perspective illustrated in *British Architect*, 15 November 1895, pp. 348–9 and *Academy Architecture*, 7, January 1895, p. 56.

1896

Winter/Spring: McGibbon's perspective shown at Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts (350). ⁴

1901

Design for Royal Insurance Company included in architecture section of Glasgow International Exhibition 1901 (1). Catalogue names architects as 'John Honeyman, R. S. A.; John Keppie, I. A.; Chas. R. Macintosh [sic]'. ⁵

Description

Background to competition

Founded in Liverpool in 1845, the Royal Insurance Company quickly established a presence in other British cities. Its agents are first listed in the *Glasgow Post Office Directory* for 1846, and by 1872 it had an office at 40 Royal Exchange Square. In the 1890s the Company planned prestigious new offices in both Glasgow and Liverpool, for which architectural competitions were held in 1894 and 1895 respectively. While the Liverpool contest was national in scope, the Glasgow one was limited to three local practices: Burnet, Son & Campbell; John Honeyman & Keppie; and Thomson & Sandilands. ¹ The site was at the corner of Buchanan Street and Royal Bank Place. Thomson & Sandilands' design was selected, but John Honeyman & Keppie were rewarded with a premium of £50 on 19 February 1895. ²

John Honeyman & Keppie's office cash book records that they paid Alexander McGibbon £6 6s 0d for an unspecified number of perspective drawings on 4 February 1895, one of which, identified by the initials 'R. I.', was evidently of the proposed Royal Insurance building. ³ McGibbon's drawing was published that year in *Academy Architecture* and in the *British Architect*, and it provides the only surviving record of their design. ⁴



The design

The domed corner tower would have signalled the building's presence effectively in the long vista of Buchanan Street. David Walker has pointed out that the top part, with its alternate niches of different heights, seems to be derived from John Belcher's unexecuted baroque design of 1891 for completing the South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria and Albert) in London.⁵ The lower part of the tower, with its sheer walls and flat vertical strips at the angles, is one of several features that echo John Honeyman & Keppie's Mitchell Lane building for the *Glasgow Herald*, begun in March 1894 and still under construction in 1895. Other distinctive details shared by the Glasgow Herald building and Royal Insurance designs are the bell-shaped pediments superimposed on outward-curving lengths of cornice; the square-headed, two-light windows with column mullions and semicircular lights above; and the window sills with swept corners, like deep shelves resting on chunky, square brackets.



These distinctive sills occur again at the firm's Martyrs Public School of 1895, as do the banded window architraves and the peculiar, bulbous consoles supporting the ground-floor cornice.



Since Mackintosh was, by his own account, the uncredited author of the Glasgow Herald building, and almost certainly of Martyrs Public School, it is likely on stylistic grounds that he also contributed significantly to the Royal Insurance design (although it is surprising that he did not draw the perspective, as he did for the other two buildings). When the design was included in the architecture section of the Glasgow International Exhibition in 1901 (1), the catalogue acknowledged his involvement, naming the architects as 'John Honeyman, R. S. A.; John Keppie, I. A.; Chas. R. Macintosh [sic]'. Given the prestige of both client and location, it is appropriate that the design is more richly decorated than the back-street newspaper offices or humble board school. Nevertheless, there is a severity about the almost windowless tower and the absence of a crowning cornice which sets the Royal Insurance design apart from other Glasgow commercial palaces of the period, such as William Leiper's exuberant Sun Life Building of 1889–94 at 117–21 West George Street.

Critical reception

McGibbon's perspective was shown at the Royal Scottish Academy in Spring 1895 (501), where the *Glasgow Herald* described the design as '... somewhat original ... The general effect is dignified and severe, not in the least traditional, but perhaps no worse for that. There is no cornice above the first floor level, and in the treatment of the re-entering angles throughout the work there is a peculiarity in that these are always rounded off.'⁶

In November that year, when Thomson & Sandilands' winning design was already under construction, the *British Architect* accompanied its reproduction of McGibbon's perspective with the observation that 'Messrs. Honeyman & Keppie's designs are amongst the most noticeable and original in this country, and the building we illustrate today is no exception to the rule. The angle tower, with lead cupola for crown, would have been a telling and picturesque feature at the corner of Buchanan Street.'⁷

The following year the design was shown at the Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts (350), where the Glasgow trade journal *Building Industries* noted that it was marked by 'Appropriateness and [an] entire absence of that cheap air of pretension which makes so many business blocks of the sort look ridiculous'.⁸

People

Other:

- Alexander McGibbon

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

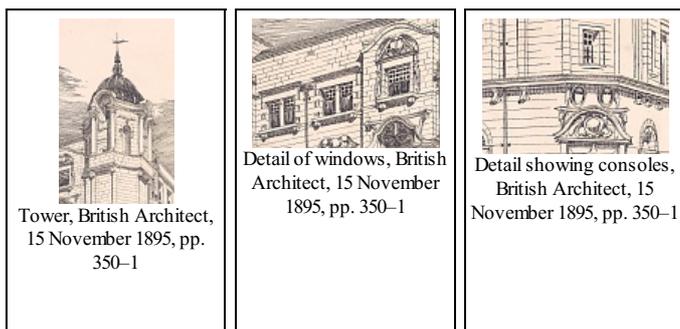
of the measurer (quantity surveyor) is usually at the top of the right-hand page, followed by information about payments to contractors and suppliers. All of the data for M102 is entered in the tables below.

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 M102 has been extracted from the job books:

Documents

Images



Bibliography

Published

- Alan Crawford, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1995, p. 210
- James Macaulay, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh*, New York: W. W. Norton, 2010, pp. 179–180
- David Walker, 'The Glasgow Years', in Wendy Kaplan, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh*, New York and London: Abbeville Press, 1996, pp. 115–148
- *Academy Architecture*, 1895, p. 56
- *British Architect*, 44, 15 November 1895, p. 344
- *Building Industries*, 6, 15 February 1896, p. 162
- *Glasgow Herald*, 19 April 1895, p. 9

Notes:

- 1: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: John Honeyman & Keppie / Honeyman, Keppie & Mackintosh / Keppie Henderson cash book, 1889–1917, GLAHA 53079, p. 30.
- 2: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: John Honeyman & Keppie / Honeyman, Keppie & Mackintosh / Keppie Henderson cash book, 1889–1917, GLAHA 53079, p. 30.
- 3: *Glasgow Herald*, 19 April 1895, p. 9.
- 4: *Building Industries*, 6, 15 February 1896, p. 162.
- 5: *International Exhibition Glasgow 1901: Official Catalogue of the Fine Art Section*, Glasgow: Charles P. Watson, [1901], p. 115.
- 6: *British Architect*, 44, 15 November 1895, p. 344.
- 7: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: John Honeyman & Keppie / Honeyman, Keppie & Mackintosh / Keppie Henderson cash book, 1889–1917, GLAHA 53079, p. 30.
- 8: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: John Honeyman & Keppie / Honeyman, Keppie & Mackintosh / Keppie Henderson cash book, 1889–1917, GLAHA 53079, p. 30.
- 9: *Academy Architecture*, 7, January 1895, p. 56; *British Architect*, 44, 15 November 1895, following p. 344.
- 10: David Walker, 'The Glasgow Years', in Wendy Kaplan, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh*, New York and London: Abbeville Press, 1996, pp. 126, 128. William Bingham McGuinness's perspective drawing of Belcher's design is reproduced in Gavin Stamp, *The Great Perspectivists*, London: Trefoil Books, 1982, p. 110.

11: *Glasgow Herald*, 19 April 1895, p. 9.

12: *British Architect*, 44, 15 November 1895, p. 344.

13: *Building Industries*, 6, 15 February 1896, p. 162.

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.



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