

M132 Competition design for Belfast City Hall

Introduction

John Honeyman & Keppie entered the two-stage design competition for this major public building, but they did not progress beyond the first stage. No visual record of their design appears to survive, but a description published in 1898 says that it was partly modelled on 17th-century Scottish buildings such as Holyrood Palace and George Heriot's Hospital, both in Edinburgh, and partly on Italian Renaissance examples, and that it had a dome. ¹

Authorship: This is one of over 270 jobs carried out in the office of John Honeyman & Keppie (Honeyman, Keppie & Mackintosh from 1901) during Mackintosh's time there. Mackintosh undoubtedly worked on many of these, but there is no specific evidence for his involvement in this case.

Alternative names: Belfast Municipal Buildings; Belfast Town Hall.

Status: Unbuilt

Grid reference: NW 46241 29465

Chronology

1896

July: Two-stage architectural competition announced for new Belfast City Hall, to cost £150,000. Three designs are to be selected for the second stage, and three premiums of £100 awarded. Alfred Waterhouse and J. C. Bretland, the Belfast City Surveyor, to act as assessors. ¹

23 July: John Honeyman & Keppie pay one guinea to J. C. Bretland, evidently a deposit for the competition conditions. ²

25 October: Closing date for entries. ³

7 November: Waterhouse and Bretland are examining 51 entries. ⁴

11 December: Belfast Corporation confirms the assessors' shortlist: Malcolm Stark & Rowntree and James Miller, both of Glasgow; and a third, unnamed practice, presumably Thomas & Son (Alfred Brumwell Thomas) of London. ⁵

24 December: John Honeyman & Keppie's guinea deposit refunded. ⁶

1897

1 April: Thomas & Son of London named as overall winners of the competition. ⁷

1898

Elevations of John Honeyman & Keppie's unsuccessful entry exhibited at the Royal Scottish Academy. ⁸

Description

The architectural competition for this, one of the grandest British public buildings of the period, attracted entries from across the United Kingdom. The two-stage contest was announced in July 1896, with a closing date of 25 October, after which three entrants would be selected to refine their designs for the second stage. ¹ John Honeyman & Keppie paid the required deposit of one guinea for the competition conditions on 23 July, and theirs was presumably among the 51 designs examined by the assessors, Alfred Waterhouse and the Belfast City Surveyor, J. C. Bretland, in early November. ²

An attempt to engineer a local victory by adding a Belfast architect to the shortlist caused controversy, but in the end Waterhouse's and Bretland's choice was upheld. ³ Two of the three designs they selected were by Glasgow architects: Malcolm Stark & Rowntree and James Miller. ⁴ The authors of the third were not identified in press reports at the time, but they must have been Thomas & Son (Alfred Brumwell Thomas), of London, who were finally named as overall winners on 1 April 1897. ⁵ The City Hall was built to their imposing domed baroque design and opened in 1906. The competition had laid down no conditions with regard to style, but the designs of three of the runners up – the only ones to be published – were also classical with domes. ⁶

No visual record of John Honeyman & Keppie's unsuccessful design appears to survive, but when they showed three elevations from it at the Royal Scottish Academy in 1898 (558), the *Glasgow Herald* described the drawings in these terms: 'In the south elevation, which we like best, a low proportion with simplicity of design prevails, recalling, or maybe suggested by, the quadrangles of such buildings as Heriot's [Hospital] or Holyrood [Palace]. The north

elevation is taller, richer, and more Italian in feeling, while a dome of Italian character crowns the pile.' ⁷ Whether Mackintosh had any part in producing this design is not known.



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 M132 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 M132 has been extracted from the job books:

Documents



Images

Bibliography

Published

- *Glasgow Herald*, 12 March 1898, p. 4

Unpublished

- The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: John Honeyman & Keppie / Honeyman, Keppie & Mackintosh cash book, GLAHA 53079, pp. 37, 39

Notes:

- 1: *Glasgow Herald*, 12 March 1898, p. 4
- 2: *British Architect*, 46, 17 July 1896, p. 38.
- 3: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: John Honeyman & Keppie / Honeyman, Keppie & Mackintosh / Keppie Henderson cash book, 1889–1917, GLAHA 53079, p. 37.
- 4: *British Architect*, 46, 17 July 1896, p. 38.
- 5: *Builder*, 71, 7 November 1896, p. 387.
- 6: *Builder*, 71, 5 December 1896, p. 470; 12 December 1896, pp. 491–2; 19 December 1896, p. 519.
- 7: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: John Honeyman & Keppie / Honeyman, Keppie & Mackintosh / Keppie Henderson cash book, 1889–1917, GLAHA 53079, p. 39.
- 8: *Builder*, 72, 3 April 1897, p. 320.
- 9: *Glasgow Herald*, 12 March 1898, p. 4.
- 10: *British Architect*, 46, 17 July 1896, p. 38.
- 11: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: John Honeyman & Keppie's cashbook, GLAHA 53079, p. 37; *Builder*, 71, 7 November 1896, p. 387.
- 12: *British Architect*, 46, 4 December 1896, p. 396; *Belfast News-Letter*, 12 December 1896, p. 6.
- 13: *Builder*, 71, 5 December 1896, p. 470; 12 December 1896, pp. 491–2.
- 14: *Builder*, 72, 3 April 1897, p. 320.
- 15: Paul Larmour, *Belfast City Hall: an architectural history*, Belfast: Ulster Architectural Heritage Society, 2010, p. 19, p. 29.
- 16: *Glasgow Herald*, 12 March 1898, p. 4.

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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