

M163 Competition design for Glasgow premises of the National Bank of Scotland

Introduction

This was John Honeyman & Keppie's entry in the limited architectural competition for the National Bank of Scotland's prestigious offices in the centre of Glasgow.

Authorship: The style of draughtsmanship is Mackintosh's, and the drawing was in his possession at his death.

Status: Unbuilt

Grid reference: NS 59001 65388

Chronology

1898

13 October: John Honeyman & Keppie are one of seven firms invited to take part in an architectural competition for a new building for the National Bank of Scotland at the corner of Buchanan Street and St Vincent Street, Glasgow. ¹

31 December: Closing date for entries. ²

1899

25 January: John Honeyman & Keppie receive a 100 guinea honorarium for their unsuccessful design. ³

Description

In October 1898 the Edinburgh-based National Bank of Scotland decided to hold a limited architectural competition for prestigious new premises in the centre of Glasgow. Seven firms were invited to take part: R. Rowand Anderson, T. P. Marwick, Sydney Mitchell & Wilson and Peddie & Washington Browne, all from Edinburgh; and John Honeyman & Keppie, J. J. Burnet and James Thomson, from Glasgow. ¹

Competitors were sent a plan of the site at the corner of St Vincent Street and Buchanan Street, and a letter briefly outlining the wishes of the Bank's directors. ² As well as accommodation for the Bank's own business, the new building was to include 'lettable shops and offices of the highest class', and competitors were asked to give special attention to the rental income these might generate. It was left to the architects to decide whether the public entrance should be from Buchanan Street or St Vincent Street, or at the corner; the height of the building was also left open. With regard to architectural treatment, it was stated that the directors did not favour 'elaborate decoration of the external part', and had 'expressed a leaning towards a thoroughly businesslike building of the highest class and of chaste design'. The deadline for submissions was the end of the year.

Six of the invited firms submitted drawings, and according to the minutes of the Bank's Premises Committee for 6 January 1899, in two cases the same firm submitted two alternative designs. ³ The Committee considered the entries anonymously before recommending to the board of directors those sent in by Rowand Anderson and Peddie & Washington Browne. The minutes explain that the latter was one of the firms which had submitted two alternatives, and it was one of their designs that the board finally selected.

Only one of the drawings sent in by John Honeyman & Keppie survives. ⁴ It is uncoloured, as the terms of the competition demanded, and it illustrates the principal elevations to St Vincent Street and Buchanan Street. The sheet is inscribed 'No. 5', showing that it was originally part of a set, and 'Design B', showing that John Honeyman & Keppie must have been the other firm who submitted two alternative proposals. The draughtsmanship is clearly Mackintosh's, and the drawing remained in his possession at his death. The style is a version of 17th-century baroque, and more orthodox in its details than the Glasgow Herald buildings and the design for the Royal Insurance Company's offices of four or five years earlier.

The middle of the St Vincent Street elevation, where Mackintosh placed the main entrance, is treated as a four-storey palazzo with giant pilasters linking the two upper floors and a bold cornice above. But framing this – and almost dwarfing it – are bays to either side incorporating ogee-domed turrets, and a further two floors of offices on top. Again in contrast to the Glasgow Herald and Royal Insurance designs with their prominent towers, the corner is only weakly emphasised by a flat-topped polygonal turret that does not rise above roof level. ⁵

Competitors had been instructed that if lettable shops were included they should be on the Buchanan Street front. Mackintosh's drawing shows office windows

along the ground floor on this side, but a flap of paper can be lifted to reveal an alternative treatment, with a glazed shop front filling the S. half. His failure to provide more income-generating shops may have told against his design, since Peddie & Washington Browne's building has shops all the way along. Despite the directors' disavowal of 'elaborate decoration', the executed design is sumptuous, and seems richer than Mackintosh's rejected proposal.



The unsuccessful competitors were rewarded with an honorarium of 100 guineas. John Honeyman & Keppie received theirs on 25 January 1899.⁶

Critical reception

The design was shown at the Royal Scottish Academy exhibition in 1900 (515), where the critic of the *Glasgow Herald*, having noted the high proportion of competitive and 'proposal' drawings in the architecture section, described it in these terms:

Another competition design for a public or semi-public building – that for the National Bank, Glasgow, by Messrs Honeyman & Keppie, No. 515 – belongs to a different category from those already referred to, being marked by the originality of conception and treatment which one associates with much of the work coming from this office. In this instance, moreover, more restraint has been exercised in searching after the *bizarre*, more feeling for what is good in tradition displayed, and the design gains rather than loses in consequence. The flat-roofed octagonal corner rather lacks in mass compared with the rest of the design and would be uninteresting as to outline in execution. *Glasgow Herald*, 17 April 1900, p. 3.

The same review was reprinted in the *British Architect*.⁸ The project was also exhibited by the practice at the Glasgow International Exhibition 1901 (311).

People

Clients:

- National Bank of Scotland

Documents

Images

Bibliography

Published

- David Walker, 'The Glasgow Years', in Wendy Kaplan, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh*, New York and London: Abbeville Press, 1996, p.115–51
- 'Architecture at the Royal Scottish Academy', *British Architect*, 53, 20 April 1900, pp. 273–4
- *Glasgow Herald*, 17 April 1900, p. 3

Unpublished

- Hiroaki Kimura, 'Charles Rennie Mackintosh: Architectural Drawings', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 1982, pp. 32–3
- Edinburgh, The Royal Bank of Scotland Group Archives: National Bank Board Minutes, NS/22/35 (1); NS/22/36(1)

Notes:

- 1: Edinburgh, The Royal Bank of Scotland Group Archives: National Bank Board Minutes, NS/22/35(1).
- 2: Edinburgh, The Royal Bank of Scotland Group Archives: National Bank Board Minutes, NS/22/35(1).
- 3: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: John Honeyman & Keppie / Honeyman, Keppie & Mackintosh / Keppie Henderson cash book, 1889–1917, GLAHA 53079, p. 51.
- 4: Edinburgh, The Royal Bank of Scotland Group Archives: National Bank Board Minutes, NS/22/35(1).
- 5: Edinburgh, The Royal Bank of Scotland Group Archives: National Bank Board Minutes, NS/22/35(1).
- 6: Edinburgh, The Royal Bank of Scotland Group Archives: National Bank Board Minutes, NS/22/36(1).

7: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: GLAHA 52587 (M163-001).

8: Burnet's design, exhibited at the Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts in 1901 (728), had a domed corner tower: *Builders' Journal and Architectural Record*, 13, 1 May 1901, p. 240.

9: The Hunterian, University of Glasgow: John Honeyman & Keppie / Honeyman, Keppie & Mackintosh / Keppie Henderson cash book, 1889–1917, GLAHA 53079, p. 51.

10: *Glasgow Herald*, 17 April 1900, p. 3.

11: 'Architecture at the Royal Scottish Academy', *British Architect*, 53, 20 April 1900, pp. 273–4.

Mackintosh Architecture: Context, Making and Meaning

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