

### **Notes of Contributors (up to 50 words)**

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### **The Glasgow School of Art Archives and Collections**

#### **Abstract (c150 words)**

The Glasgow School of Art (GSA) has a rich creative heritage, connected closely to the artistic and social history of Glasgow and the West of Scotland. Probably best known for its main building designed by alumnus Charles Rennie Mackintosh, the School also holds an incredibly comprehensive archive and a diverse collection of fine art, architecture, and design pieces by former staff and students. Since 2006 GSA has been working on a Heritage Lottery Funded project to conserve this rich heritage and make it more accessible to visitors. This has involved a wide ranging conservation programme for the interior of its Mackintosh building and for the School's historic collections. It has also comprised the development of new storage facilities and improved visitor areas. Around 20,000 visitors currently come to GSA annually to see Mackintosh's architectural masterwork, however interest is now also growing in other areas of the School's archives and collections.

#### **Main text (4330 words including endnotes and references)**

The Glasgow School of Art (GSA) was opened in 1845 as a Government School of Design. It was one of several such Schools established throughout the United Kingdom to encourage the development of high quality design work which would support Britain's manufacturing centres such as Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester and Glasgow. All of the Government Schools of Design followed the same curriculum, as directed centrally from London, driven by the belief that 'a thorough knowledge of Drawing and Design' was a 'necessary ground-work of the training of all engaged in manufacturing or

constructive work'<sup>i</sup>. However, in the 1890s The Glasgow School of Art began to develop its own unique reputation amongst these design schools. This was created by increasing success in national competitions, the participation in international exhibitions such as those held in Paris and Venice, and the development of a distinctive 'Glasgow Style' of design. This time of intense development coincides with the tenure of the then Headmaster of the School, Francis (Fra) Newbery. This energetic individual developed connections with many of the leading artists and designers of the period and had a talent for publicising the School's activities and the work of its students. It was also during Newbery's time as Headmaster that GSA established its own curriculum in 1901, overseen by the Scotch Education Department. This move allowed more focus on practical work in technical studios in addition to the previous focus on design draughtsmanship. This new curriculum developed alongside the construction of the School's first purpose built facilities in the form of the now internationally renowned Charles Rennie Mackintosh art school building.

The 'Mackintosh Building' as it is known today was built in two phases (1897-1899 and 1907-1909). By the early 1890s the School had recognised for some time that in order to accommodate the growing number of students and provide suitable facilities a purpose built Art School was required, and it was at this point that funds were actively sought for a new building. Therefore, in 1896 having raised £21,000 (over one million pounds in today's money) the School set-up an architectural competition to find a design for this new building. Eleven architects entered the competition but all of them felt that the design brief for the new School (provided in the detailed competition rules) could not be met with the funds available (£14,000 of the £21,000 raised). It was therefore decided that each competition entry should mark on it which portion of the building could be constructed for the available money, the remainder of the building being completed after further funds were raised. Charles Rennie Mackintosh's design was submitted by the architectural company Honeyman and Keppie. It was this design that found approval from the judges.

Mackintosh had been a student at the art school in the 1880s and 1890s and so had first hand experience of the classes being taught there and the requirements of the students and staff. His architectural design follows the competition guidelines, which give details of the number of rooms needed, their dimensions, locations within the building, and where their windows should be situated. However, Mackintosh's hand is apparent in every aspect of the completed building, from its vast sandstone East facade to the decorative tile work on the staircases. Money was a large issue in the construction of the art school. The use of cheap materials, finished to add a more luxurious feel, is common throughout the building. For example, corridors are lined with pine paneling which has been stained black to take on the look of a dark hardwood finish, and staircases are finished in cement, polished to create a marble-like effect. However, despite such cost-saving measures Mackintosh still managed to take the project over budget and the above economies are accompanied throughout the building with indulgent decorative touches such as stained glass door panels and the extravagant interior of the School Library (the last room to be completed, when funds were at their lowest). The building also boasted the latest electric lighting and an up-to-the-minute hot-air heating system (fired by a coal boiler in the basement from which hot air was pumped around the building and into rooms through grills situated in the ceilings and walls). At all points in the building functionality is coupled with aesthetics and a tour of the premises reveals the vast variety of genres Mackintosh drew from to create his own unique style. The eastern half of the building, plus the main entrance, were built in the first phase 1897-1899 and show an arts and crafts influence in his work. The original building interior consisted of bare brick work, dark stained wood and motifs drawn from nature. The western side of the building, completed between 1907-1909, has a more modernist feel with the West facade's dramatic three storey high windows and a move towards more geometric, abstract shapes. The influence of Japan is present throughout the building with both halves including wooden beam structures and 'Japanese' style symbols.

The architectural drawings for the first phase of the building were submitted

under the company name of Honeyman and Keppie. However, by the time the second phase had been completed and a set of presentation drawings given to the School, Mackintosh had become a partner in the architectural firm and his name therefore appears on these later drawings. Mackintosh's career as an architect and designer flourished in the 1890s and early 1900s as he completed designs for schools, office buildings, private houses and tea rooms. However, despite his and his wife Margaret MacDonald's forward thinking designs gaining growing recognition in continental Europe, they failed to receive the same level of interest in Glasgow. Furthermore, it seems that as Mackintosh's career progressed, he was becoming more difficult to work with, resulting in less architectural work being offered to him. In 1914 the Mackintoshes decided to move away from Glasgow to see if they could gain more success in the South of England. Unfortunately, the period leading up to the outbreak of the First World War saw a severe reduction in building work across the UK and apart from a number of interior designs, Mackintosh completed relatively few commissions. By 1923 the Mackintoshes had moved to the South of France, Mackintosh had stopped his architecture and design work and instead focused on painting the French landscape. He returned to England with ill health in 1927 and died in 1928 with his reputation at a much reduced level to that which he enjoys today.

Indeed today's recognition of Mackintosh as a world class architect and designer is the result of a gradual increase in the acknowledgment of his work and further research into it. Such research has its roots in the 1930s when Nikolaus Pevsner noted the School's Mackintosh building in his publication *Pioneers of the Modern Movement* and when Tom Howarth, a member of the School's architecture staff, began his PhD studies into Mackintosh. The publication of this PhD *Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement* in 1952 brought more academic attention to Mackintosh but it was not until the centenary of the architect's birth in 1968 that the Art School began to recognise the importance of its building and its collection of Mackintosh furniture and drawings. In this year a memorial exhibition was held at the Royal Scottish Museum in Edinburgh to which the School loaned several pieces from its collections and GSA published its first catalogues

outlining its Mackintosh holdings. Academic interest continued to increase throughout the 1970s. However, it was not until the early 1980s that the GSA realised interest in its heritage required active management through visitor tours and the appointment of a Curator. Since that point, The Glasgow School of Art's building has become a focal point of Glasgow's cultural tourism and more recently for the city's 'Mackintosh trail'. The School's building provides a fantastic example of the development of Mackintosh's architecture and design work due to it spanning over ten years from its inception to completion, and visitors are able to see it still being used for its original purpose, as a functioning art school. Today, around 20,000 visitors come to the School every year.

Until more recent times, it has been unusual for an art school to consider itself as a tourist attraction, or indeed as a custodian of art, design and architectural heritage. The work of an art school is to nurture new talent, often pushing boundaries and re-defining creative processes. The Glasgow School of Art with its Mackintosh lineage perhaps discovered earlier than most that the history of their institution and the artists, designers and architects affiliated with it were of real interest to academic researchers and to the general public. Furthermore, the School realised that its heritage was also of value in creating a sense of pride, quality and tradition within the School that could be built upon by new generations of students. In the early 1980s when GSA appointed its first Curator to look after the Mackintosh Building and the art objects the School had acquired throughout the years, this individual's first job was to actually locate many of the art items the School held but which had been put away in cupboards, or set to one side by staff and students who had no current use for them. In addition to this, the Curator needed to create up-to-date documentation for the many items which furnished the corridors and rooms of the Mackintosh building such as Mackintosh chairs, nineteenth-century plaster casts, and stained glass panels. The Mackintosh collection of furniture and watercolours was, and still is, the jewel in the crown of these collections. Comprising of around 300 items, it is the third largest collection of Mackintosh's work in the world. However, the collections are certainly much broader than many people realise and give a good overview of GSA's

activities throughout its one hundred and sixty year history. The art school has built up a strong reputation in the discipline of drawing and painting, and the collections contain examples of work by many of GSA's best known painting alumni, including Joan Eardley, David Donaldson, and James Robertson. The archives and collections also contain a variety of architectural designs, reflecting Glasgow's Victorian growth and later post-war regeneration. Examples of work by Alexander McGibbon, J.J. Burnett and Alexander 'Greek' Thomson sit alongside the archive of modernist architects Gillespie, Kidd and Coia. Unusually for an institution set up as a Design School and famous for the Glasgow Style designers it produced, the collections do not have a large number of design pieces. There are some examples of painted ceramics (a popular activity at the turn of the twentieth century) and of metalwork (mainly in the form of School medals), along with some Glasgow Style textile pieces but these certainly do not form the bulk of material. This reflects the fact that the School historically has not actively collected examples of work by its students. Rather, the collections comprise of items gifted to GSA at a later date by their creator or current owner, or material which students seem to have forgotten to take away with them! More recently, areas of the collection for development have been identified so that a more structured approach can be taken. We are aware that as the collection stands, the importance of some of GSA's disciplines is not apparent.

The appointment of a Curator was followed in the 1990s by the appointment of the School's first Archivist. Again, archival records were to be found all over the School. The importance of many older items had already been recognised and their care overseen by the School Library, however, more recent material could be found in attic spaces and cupboards throughout the campus. Indeed, we are still finding items in long forgotten areas of our now, one hundred year old Mackintosh Building. The comprehensiveness of the archives, including annual reports, prospectuses, correspondence files, photographs and ephemera, provide a fantastic resource for tracking changes in the history of the GSA, its personnel and infrastructure, and indeed the wider relationship between art, architecture, design and society. A large number of enquiries received by the archives relate to individuals who studied or taught at the

GSA. Student records survive from 1881 onwards and most senior staff are listed in annual reports and prospectuses and/or are referred to in other paperwork. We can therefore provide confirmation on the dates an individual studied or worked at the School and, more interestingly perhaps, the archives can also provide details as to what their experience of the GSA would have been like.

Through the archives we can also track how the GSA's curriculum has developed over its one hundred and sixty year history, from its establishment as a Design School to its move towards training fine artists and developing architectural courses. In the nineteenth century, drawing was the foundation stone for all of the School's courses and students were encouraged to spend weeks perfecting a life drawing or indeed drawing from 'the cast' i.e. from GSA's collection of plaster casts. When independence from the London directed curriculum was gained in the early twentieth century, more practice-based technical classes were introduced to teach skills such as embroidery and metalwork. Later on in the twentieth century further developments were made to address changes in society's requirements of its visual culture. Classes in Commercial Art and Industrial Design (which aimed to encourage students 'to deal with the problems of Design in the field of quantity-production'<sup>ii</sup>) were introduced as a step away from the fine art and crafts based curriculum. More recently, the creation of the GSA's Digital Design Studio in the 1990s recognised the importance of art and design to computer technology and vice-versa. Many researchers are interested in the School's curriculum as an aid to understanding the art, design and architecture that the GSA trained artists, designers and architects went on to produce. Reports on the different areas of the curriculum reveal the School's intentions in delivering these courses as well as external views on their success while examples of alumni's work held in our collections show the results of these training methods.

The environment of the the GSA campus has also changed over the School's history and these developments are documented in the archives. The Mackintosh Building may still be at the heart of GSA's campus, but the

surrounding area has changed considerably. By the 1930s the School had already outgrown the Mackintosh Building and a number of Victorian houses on the same road were being used to accommodate classes. In the 1960s GSA had decided to radically redevelop this area and three new premises (interestingly all of which were also designed by Honeyman and Keppie architects) were constructed on the site of the Victorian buildings. These buildings, the Newbery Tower, the Foulis Building and the Bourdon Building have all since undergone alterations and been home to various School activities including studio spaces, the School Library and the staff and student canteen. The Assembly Hall building (our current Students Union) from the 1930s still remains on the corner of this site having survived the 1960s development as funds ran out before plans for this area could be realised. The ground floor of this building is decorated with fittings from a traditional Italian Glasgow café (salvaged by architecture students in the 1970s and now used as a functioning bar). Many of the School's buildings have interesting histories or features as they were not purpose built for the GSA but acquired by the School and adapted for its purposes. The Haldane building, a former Territorial Army (TA) centre, still houses a huge ramp at its centre, built to allow the TA's vehicles access to its upper floors. whilst the glazed brick interior of the Barnes building hints at its former life as two adjacent hospitals. The variety of buildings on the campus reflect the history of Glasgow's built environment from its nineteenth-century wealth through to its redevelopment in the 1960s and 1970s. The School is currently planning new buildings to replace its late twentieth-century developments which are no longer suitable for the GSA's needs, and so the setting of the Mackintosh Building continues to change.

As well as providing written evidence of the School's activities, the archives also provide a rich selection of visual material that illustrates the different eras of the GSA. Our photograph collections include a wide variety of images from students at work (and play), to special events, exhibitions and degree show images. These are regularly used by visitors to see examples of changing fashions, different working techniques, and GSA activities. Our ephemera collection presents a wealth of visual material comprising flyers for student

masques, balls and fashion shows, menus for graduation dinners and posters for artist talks and events. Most of these items were designed and printed in-house at the GSA and their use of colour, pattern and type faces, as well as the techniques used to create them, provide a rich resource for visitors to explore and derive creative inspiration from.

The above collections and archive material all relate to things created by the School and its personnel. However, in addition to these items our holdings contain a variety of material acquired by the School for teaching purposes, in particular our collection of plaster casts, glass lantern slides, and textiles. GSA currently holds in the region of two hundred plaster casts, from fairly small scale architectural pieces to full size statues, representing examples of sculpture from ancient Greece and Rome and from medieval and renaissance Europe. In the nineteenth century, a collection of plaster casts was an essential tool for supplying an education in art and design. Our 1901 inventory shows GSA purchasing over eighty plaster casts in one year. Although this is somewhat higher than in other years listed (where in the region of thirty were acquired), it suggests the School's collection of plaster casts ran into the hundreds and that any damaged items were regularly replaced. The importance of these casts to the curriculum cannot be underestimated. Students would be required to perfect their drawing technique from the casts before moving on to drawing from the life. The casts provided abundant subject matter for these students to work from and gave examples of art work that was not available to see elsewhere in Glasgow. Photographs show the corridors and walls of the Mackintosh Building crowded with plaster casts and students sketching from them. Our cast collection continues to inhabit the Mackintosh Building's corridors and public spaces but in slightly less bountiful numbers.

Our collection of over three thousand glass lantern slides also originates from the late nineteenth / early twentieth century and was used to show students examples of architecture, costume, landscapes and artworks that they would not be able to access in Glasgow. The School still has the original lantern slide projector for the ground floor lecture theatre in the Mackintosh Building.

The projector is illuminated with a naked flame and therefore would have been positioned at the front of the room close by the surface on which it was to project (its light source not being strong enough to travel from the back of the theatre).

Our textile collections cover a much wider date range than our plaster casts and lantern slides. They include a number of items created by GSA staff and students. However, approximately half of the collection of circa three hundred items were acquired by GSA to serve as teaching examples, one such teaching collection being our Needlework Development Scheme (NDS) pieces. The Needlework Development Scheme was originally set up in the 1930s and GSA was closely linked to it from the beginning. The scheme was sponsored by Coats Thread Manufacturers of Paisley and its purpose was to collect quality examples of different embroidery styles and techniques. These examples were then sent in groups to various art schools, colleges and embroiderers' guilds to encourage students and needlework enthusiasts to develop new designs and try out new techniques. The Archives and Collections still hold a NDS suitcase presumably used for this purpose. At the outset of the scheme, the GSA's then Head of Embroidery, Kathleen Mann, was asked to oversee the collection of Central and Eastern European items as she was well known as an expert in this field. Various examples of British needlework were gathered, along with examples from all over Europe and Asia. By the time the scheme ended in the 1960s, hundreds of items had been collected. This material was subsequently divided up between various museums, guilds and education colleges, including the four Scottish art colleges (Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen). The GSA received a diverse range of items from the NDS including costume and domestic pieces, amongst which are a nineteenth century Chinese Imperial Robe, a seventeenth-century example of British stumpwork and a range of 1930s embroidered pieces which, when purchased, were at the forefront of new designs styles and techniques.

Teaching and learning is still a major focus of The Glasgow School of Art and the Archives and Collections Centre strives to ensure the material we hold is

made available for use by our students. As a creative education institute, emphasis is placed on using the archives and collections as a resource for studio work preparation, from illustrating different techniques, to providing inspiration for new work, as well as a resource for written research work. A programme of student projects and inductions is being developed, alongside an exhibition programme which aims to open up our holdings to new audiences. The Archives and Collections team are also currently involved in the GSA's Heritage Lottery funded Mackintosh Conservation and Access (MCA) Project, started in 2006 and due for completion in 2010. This project has provided new environmentally controlled and monitored storage facilities for the archives and collections material. It has also supported a wide ranging conservation programme which aims to ensure the long-term preservation of our holdings while allowing them to be accessed more easily. This project has included working with a number of specialist conservators for paper, textile, furniture and plaster cast conservation. Our Mackintosh furniture collection has been treated so that items can be safely displayed for visitors and to ensure that pieces of material still in use (for example the Mackintosh Library tables and chairs) are structurally sound and fit for purpose. Our textile items have undergone interventive treatments to clean and repair damaged items. Bespoke packaging has also been created for many items in order to support the textiles appropriately and allow for them to be viewed with minimal handling. The School's plaster casts will all be cleaned and repaired as necessary and we are developing new signage to promote knowledge about these items which are often taken for granted as part of the fixtures and fittings of the building. Our collection of paper based art works and paper and photographic archives have all been surveyed and interventive and packaging work undertaken.. We are also making surrogates for a number of the most frequently used or fragile items so that access to these materials can be permitted without fear of adversely damaging the originals.

The MCA project has allowed GSA to provide improved visitor facilities. A new Archives and Collections Centre (ACC) opened in 2008. This space has been designed to have a flexible layout so that it can accommodate a number of different activities from personal study, to group work and seminars or lectures

series. The new space has also provided us with an opportunity to display some of the art work and images normally housed behind closed doors. In addition to the new ACC, the School has developed a new visitor shop and interpretation area where individuals wishing to undertake a tour of the School can buy tickets, browse and learn more about the building. Adjacent to the shop is a new Mackintosh Furniture Gallery. This is located at the end of the public tour and allows visitors to see examples of Mackintosh's furniture close up. All of the new spaces have been refurbished so that their essential elements, floor plan and materials are those of Mackintosh's original designs. Furthermore, as part of the MCA project, work will be undertaken to the interior of the whole Mackintosh Building, addressing stone and wood surfaces that need interventive conservation treatment, replacing large bulky heating plant with new efficient systems, and removing false walls and additions which have changed the layout of Mackintosh's original plans. Such work will ensure the building can continue to function effectively as a working art school while accommodating visitors who wish to explore its interiors and ensuring that the uniqueness of the building is preserved so that both of these activities can continue to flourish.

The Glasgow School of Art's Archives and Collections are now an integral part of the School's activities supporting teaching, learning and research within the GSA and ensuring the School's heritage is also made available to a wider audience. The School will no doubt be forever linked with Charles Rennie Mackintosh, its most famous alumnus. However, this link has provided a starting point for exploration into other areas of GSA's history including the many other artists, designers and architects it has trained and the School's long serving role as a focal point for the visual arts in Glasgow and the West of Scotland. Our archives and collections continue to grow and we hope that this rich and diverse resource will continue to engage new audiences. Further information about the Archives and Collections, including news of recent activities and events, can be found on our web pages, [www2.gsa.ac.uk/archivesandcollections](http://www2.gsa.ac.uk/archivesandcollections).

References:

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Buchanan, William (editor) *Mackintosh's Masterwork: The Glasgow School of Art* (2nd edition, London: A. & C. Black, 2004)

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Image references:

**Figure 1.** MC:A:17 North perspective of The Glasgow School of Art Mackintosh Building (first phase) by Alexander McGibbon, ink on paper, c1900.

**Figure 2.** Photograph of Museum in the Mackintosh Building, The Glasgow School of Art by Bedford Lemere, 1910.

**Figure 3.** NDS/F/8 Embroidered Dragon detail from Chinese Imperial Robe, nineteenth century.

**Figure 4.** NMC 88 Covered Market by Joan Eardley, ink on paper, c1948.

**Figure 5.** The Glasgow School of Art Archives and Collections Centre, photographed by Andrew Lee, 2008.

**Figure 6.** The Glasgow School of Art Mackintosh Furniture Gallery, photographed by Andrew Lee, 2008.

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<sup>i</sup> GSAA/GOV/1/2 *Report of the Committee of The Glasgow School of Art and Haldane Academy*, December 1880.

<sup>ii</sup> GSAA/REG/1/4 *The Glasgow School of Art Prospectus*, 1955-1956.