

**Rescue and Recovery: Working with Glasgow School of Art's Archives after the Mackintosh Building Fire**  
**Susannah Waters**

**Abstract**

On 23 May 2014 a fire broke out in Glasgow School of Art's A-listed Mackintosh Building. This building was also home to the School's Archives and Collections Centre and its heritage collections. These included archives, textiles, paintings, and object collections which were housed in four dedicated storerooms, plus a large number of plaster casts and examples of Mackintosh Furniture that were located throughout the building.<sup>1</sup> The day of the fire, and the weeks immediately after this event were an incredibly busy, emotional, and important time for all of GSA's staff and students. For the Archives and Collections service and for the Library team members, they comprised the assessment, where feasible the removal, and the initial stabilisation of our holdings, a task hugely aided by input from an army of volunteers. This article provides a timeline of events, describing what actions were taken and the experiences of those involved. It also outlines the different challenges related to dealing with this event, the lessons learnt from these challenges and the potential activities that will take place as part of GSA's longer-term recovery plans.

**Article**

**The Day of the Fire – Friday 23 May 2014**

It sounds like a cliché, but most people in Glasgow, as well as a large number of individuals involved in the archives or heritage sectors, probably remember where they were when they found out that the Mackintosh Building was on fire. I and a colleague were in the Archives and Collections office / reading room. It was quiet, the end-of-the week, a 'tying up loose ends before the bank-holiday weekend' type of day. However, our tranquility was interrupted by a noise from the corridor, followed by a very loud knock on the door and a GSA tutor telling us to get out immediately. People were coming towards us from our right-hand side, where flames and smoke could be seen at the doorway of an adjacent studio. We therefore knew straight away that something serious was happening.

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<sup>1</sup>For more information about The Glasgow School of Art's archives and collections see *Around the Archives, The Glasgow School of Art Archives and Collections* Scottish Archives Volume 15 (2009).

No-one was injured as a result of the fire, and the fire brigade worked very hard to ensure that the blaze didn't spread throughout the whole of the building. However, as the afternoon progressed, and flames began to appear out of the top floor and the West façade Library windows, it was obvious that the West half of the building was severely affected, and that 'The Mack' which we, and generations of other people had occupied and in some ways called home, would never quite be the same again. In addition to this, from the archives and collections point of view, all of our stores were in the West half of the building and we had no idea if they were damaged. The possible loss of the School's documentary and material culture, and the stories these revealed weighed heavily on all of us.

However, at that time there was little we could do. Standing on the street, watching the destruction of our beloved building didn't seem very useful, but I think none of us felt like we could leave. Indeed, a lot of people seemed to feel the same way as Sauchiehall Street and the surrounding area filled with students, staff and passers-by watching in shock and disbelief. Craig Geddes, Council Records Manager at East Renfrewshire Council recalls his experience as follows:

I was on annual leave on the day of the fire, and I had cycled into town in the early afternoon ... The fire had not long started and the road was still open. However, coming back along Bath St. on the way back home an hour later, the situation had taken a real turn for the worse. Huge orange flames were roaring out of the west side of the Mac and there was a real sense of concern from the hundreds of passing Glaswegians who had stopped to watch...

The wind was strong and out the NE, and the smoke followed me all the way home to the West End. I know nothing of building engineering but at the time, and given the sheer ferocity of the blaze, I feared that the Mac - and all its precious content - might be lost.

The Archives and Collections team managed to do a few 'useful' things that afternoon, such as marking-up building plans for the fire brigade with information about where the archives and artefacts were located and working with them to organize the safe retrieval of Mackintosh Furniture from a gallery located in the East side of the building. We also contacted Emma Dadson from Harwell Document Restoration Services who we had a subscription with to update her on our situation. Emma of course, had already heard about the fire via the news and agreed to come up to Glasgow (from Oxford) as soon as we knew more about our situation. We all went home that

evening not knowing when we might be able to get back into the building but presuming it would be at least several days.

### **Saturday 24 May**

Surprisingly, this was not the case and we were able to gain access the following morning. The fire brigade's understanding of the importance of the building's contents (the student work which had just been installed for that year's degree show, and the historical materials) was apparent in the huge support they gave which allowed us to start undertaking the work we needed to do as soon as possible.

The week after the fire saw the evacuation of the vast majority of the School's archives and museum collections from The Mackintosh Building to two adjacent properties: the newly completed Reid Building opposite, and the council-owned McLellan Galleries one block to the East. Looking back, the progress of the evacuation seems to have been fairly well-paced and pragmatic. However, the planning for this work was adapted on a daily basis in order to respond to changes in access to the building and the availability of resources (volunteers, materials and decant space).

The day after the fire a small number of GSA staff were allowed into the building, initially to see which areas had been affected, and then to start bringing out student and staff belongings, student art works and archives and collections material. Peter Trowles, GSA's Curator was one of the first to view the building's interior. Unfortunately, as expected, the Mackintosh Library and an Archives and Collections store above it had been almost completely destroyed. The Library interior was the most intricately decorated space inside the Mackintosh Building, with its cupboard-lined walls, carved wooden balcony, geometric metal light-shades, and bespoke furniture. It also contained approximately 10,000 books and journals some of which formed part of the School's rare books collection. The store above the Library held the majority of GSA's collection of oil paintings and a number of pieces of Mackintosh furniture.

In addition to these losses, one of our sub-basement stores and our office/reading room had suffered water ingress as a result of the fire brigade's efforts to extinguish the fire. This store contained some of our paper archives, some small plaster casts, and the majority of GSA's textiles and object collections. Some archive material was also located in our office / reading room.

In contrast to the damage to the above areas, our remaining two stores (containing the majority of the paper archives and artworks) had not been affected by the fire or by water ingress. Peter relayed this information to myself and Emma Dadson and both of us set off for the Art School. Historic Scotland were also on-site that day. Their team provided us with collections and conservation expertise and, as the week progressed, a huge amount of additional manpower. On the Saturday they worked closely with the fire brigade to clear large burnt fragments from the store above the Library. This helped to stabilise this area of the building and to ensure fragments were documented as part of the removal process.

During the Saturday afternoon, GSA staff started to remove material from the water-affected store. As aforementioned, this area held paper archives, textiles, small objects in a variety of media (metal, ceramic, wood), some small plaster casts and some reproduction Mackintosh furniture. The textiles and paper archives were our initial priority as they were the most vulnerable to water damage. A team of GSA staff advised by Peter braved the store and brought items up to the East end basement level of the building (which was unaffected by the fire, clean and close to street access on Dalhousie Street). The store, being located in the sub-basement, had no natural light or ventilation and as the building had no working electricity, working conditions were difficult. However, by the end of the afternoon, all of the textiles and boxes of paperwork had been brought upstairs where myself and Emma Dadson removed their wet packaging and began to sort them into categories (wet, damp, dry) and lay them out for airing. Emma made arrangements for a Harwell van with 200 crates and two personnel to arrive the next day so that very wet items could be removed for freezing. The School emailed staff to ask for further volunteers, and the Archives and Collections put a call out via Museums Galleries Scotland and the Institute of Conservation (Icon) for a textile conservator. We also contacted Linda Ramsay from the National Records of Scotland for assistance in relation to our paper conservation requirements.

Access to computer facilities and contact details were essential during the salvage process. A separate GSA building had been allocated as a "recovery headquarters" and I was able to use computer facilities there (to print out sheets for recording the movement of the collections and to send emails). Access to the Archives and Collections disaster plan was also important as it contained basic information on dealing with wet objects and a list of useful contacts. I held a copy of this at home and our Estates Department (not located in The Mack) also had one available. In

addition to this, I was very thankful for the contact details (including Harwell's) which I had stored in my mobile phone (just in case) and for having given out my mobile number to other archives involved in The Glasgow Area Disaster Planning Network.<sup>2</sup> This network comprises of archive services in the Glasgow area, supported by the National Records of Scotland's conservation team, who have agreed to support each other in dealing with disasters. Indeed my mobile phone became my mobile office during the week after the fire providing a means of taking notes and photographs, sending emails and even being used as a torch on occasion.

Surprisingly, at this stage of the recovery process the scale of the work seemed manageable. The main focus of the Archives and Collections team was to remove water damaged material from the building, and as only one of our stores had been affected in this way, we were confident we could achieve this in a timely manner. We foresaw the need to remove all of our collections from the site at some point but felt that this could be dealt with once items in immediate danger had been stabilised.

### **Sunday 25 May**

On the Sunday, a number of GSA staff, including Archives and Collections and Library team members arrived at 10 am for a briefing from the School's Director before starting to undertake salvage work. A decision had been made to close the whole of the School's campus for a week and so we were able to use the Reid building (opposite the Mackintosh) as a drying area. The Reid offered more space (and a much more stable environment) than the area we had been using in The Mack. A team of volunteer staff therefore began moving damp textiles over to the Reid and packing up very wet material for freezing (a Harwell Document Restoration Services' van had arrived with crates for this purpose). Alongside the textiles and archives from the sub-basement store, archive material from the A&C office / reading room was now also retrieved and sorted. Materials were listed (using pencil and paper), alongside their condition and new location (Reid / Harwell) as part of the removal and sorting process.

Linda Ramsay, Head of Conservation at the National Records of Scotland and her team arrived on the Sunday, bringing with them materials such as fans, blotting paper, and plastic sheeting to help us set up an area for drying paper items. This team returned over the course of the next few days

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<sup>2</sup><http://www.archives.org.uk/about/regions/ara-scotland/glasgow-area-disaster-planning-network.html> last viewed 19 March 2015

to continue to monitor the archives and to provide further materials, including archive boxes. Frances Lennard, a textile conservator based at Glasgow University also arrived that day to help us properly lay our damp textiles out to dry. Although removing all of the textiles from the Mackintosh Building had been a relatively quick process, laying them out to dry took more time as we hold several large rolled items. As Frances remembers “I was surprised by how many wet textiles there were – they just kept coming! It was a challenge finding space to lay them all out to dry”.

Despite such challenges, I think everyone involved in the work on the Sunday felt that it had been a positive experience as we could see we were achieving something. Nevertheless, the positive work of salvaging the archives and textiles was still set alongside the knowledge that the Mackintosh Library, its holdings and that of the store above it seemed beyond repair. Michelle Kaye, Archives and Collections Project Officer and the School’s Academic Liaison Librarians David Buri and Duncan Chappell had the difficult task of assisting Historic Scotland with their assessment of these spaces by providing information about what they had held. Due to the clear loss of the Library’s contents, a statement was also sent out at this time to Library email lists outlining the scale of the losses in this area.

Sunday’s activities finished with an agreement for the A&C and Library staff to reconvene the following morning, and an email was sent out updating everyone on what had been achieved and what the initial plans were for the following day. It had been recognized that additional conservators (textiles, objects and paper) would be required and a call out had been made for these. The fine art removals company Constantines Ltd had also been contacted with a view to arranging regular uplifts of dried material. This process of debriefing staff and planning for the next day was replicated each evening during the first week post-fire. The nature of the work, involving large numbers of people and a difficult working environment, meant that plans needed to be flexible and that keeping all staff informed of any changes was essential. The emails sent during this period have also enabled us to look back over what happened and build a clearer timeline of events.

### **Monday 26 May**

By Monday it felt like we had established a system for the removal, sorting, listing and drying of the archives and collections material. Access to the building was still difficult (we needed to have

clearance before commencing work each day and the environmental conditions were poor), but we had a clear idea of the work which needed to be undertaken. Roles were allocated where possible to fully utilize each individual's skills and staff were rotated to ensure more strenuous work was alternated with less physical activities. Regular supplies of food were also now in full flow which was a big help in keeping up energy levels and morale.

The previous two days had seen the removal of vulnerable textiles and paper items from wet areas. We now focused our efforts on removing the remaining objects (metalwork, sculpture, ceramics etc.) from the sub-basement. As aforementioned, the lack of light and humidity in this area made the work difficult but the Archives and Collection team's knowledge of our holdings made it fairly easy to identify items. A small team worked with trolleys to clear this area in a methodical manner and while this was taking place, a number of other staff remained in the Reid building, assisting external conservators by unwrapping, laying out and listing damp items, locating supplies (fans, dehumidifiers, packing materials), and providing information on our holdings as needed. Some of the objects and textiles had lost their original packaging, and with it their reference numbers which made identification by non-Archives and Collections staff difficult. As a result of this, an area of our long term recovery work is to investigate alternative ways of labelling items, where possible, directly onto objects. By this stage we had taken over a considerable amount of floor space on the ground and second floor levels of the Reid building. Despite the awful circumstances, seeing a large proportion of our collections laid out at once was a novel and rather beautiful sight. On Monday we were able to start to move items to off-site storage owned by a company we had previously worked with; we agreed to a daily pick-up with Constantines Fine Art Removers and so any dried material was sent off-site as soon as possible to free up space on campus.

### **Tuesday 27 May**

As the recovery work was now underway, discussions about longer-term plans started to take place. On reflection, this seems very early in the recovery process but at the time it seemed reasonable. Therefore I, GSA's Head of Learning Resources Alison Stevenson, and one of our Academic Liaison Librarian's Duncan Chappell met with our insurance company to discuss loss and the activities we would potentially need to undertake to restore our holdings. Some of our collections (furniture, textiles, artworks, special collection books and plaster casts) were insured with individual valuations against each item (these being based on market valuations); for these

areas we could claim for any lost items and for money towards the repair of damaged items. Our archives were insured slightly differently. We had insured this material with an overall figure for conservation work; we could therefore claim for work undertaken to repair any damaged material, however, individual items were not insured and so we could not claim against specific lost items. While some of our team met with the insurers, our Curator Peter Trowles was in communication with Historic Scotland about how best to approach the identification and analysis of the remains taken from the fire-damaged Library and store.

Our general plans for Tuesday were to start preparing dry items for removal direct to off-site storage, a process which we'd estimated would take about 10 days. However, these plans had to be completely revised when we were advised that Glasgow City Council's Building Control department wanted to take over the building from the fire brigade so that they could start to assess the fire damage. Without the fire brigade to oversee GSA's work, the building would be closed until the Council's assessment had been completed. We were told everything that we wanted to remove from the building should therefore be removed before the end of the day. At first I wasn't at all convinced we could clear both of our remaining 'dry' stores over the course of one day. However, we understood that leaving the material inside a damp and humid building for potentially several weeks would likely lead to deterioration and damage. The decision was therefore taken to set up a chain gang of staff to move the boxes and plans chest drawers from these two stores to the McLellan Galleries, a building adjacent to The Mackintosh which the School had secured from Glasgow City Council for decant purposes.

Work started in our basement level store as this contained plan chests (the bulkiest items we had to remove) and some of our most valuable and highly used material. Bubble wrap was placed on top of the contents of each plan chest drawer and these were then lifted out of their chests, and carried by two people in stages over to McLellans where staff were on hand to help stack them in order. The task of carrying the plan chest drawers was mostly undertaken by a team of Historic Scotland stonemasons. We were very grateful for their help as this was a very physically demanding task.<sup>3</sup> It is amazing how much space plan chest drawers take up once they are no longer in a plan chest and we soon filled up one whole room. Indeed, our experience with both the

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<sup>3</sup>At this point only GSA and Historic Scotland personnel were allowed access to the building for health and safety and security reasons (the external conservators who were working with us were all based in the Reid building which was also cordoned off to restrict general access).

textile and plan chest decant was that material takes up much more room when it is removed from its purpose built shelving or packaging.

I finished work at about 7pm on Tuesday (which was about average for the whole week). However, the Archives and Collections team and a large number of GSA and Historic Scotland staff stayed on to continue this work until all the plan chest drawers, and boxes of paper, photographs and glass negatives had been removed from The Mack and stacked in McLellans – this work finished at approximately 10.40pm that evening. The effort to remove this material from the building had been huge but I think everyone felt it was necessary and we were very relieved to have this area of work completed. Our concerns over leaving material in the building have since been echoed by Emma Dadson from Harwell Document Restoration Services who reflected that:

The need to evacuate dry material from the basement is something I have talked about in training situations but never had to enact. Due to security, lack of power and very elevated humidity, it was clear that the basement need to be decanted. This proactive work ... has been exceptional in terms of the preservation of collections which were not affected primarily but which were at risk.

### **Wednesday 28 May**

After the huge effort of Tuesday's decant and the work of the previous few days, some staff were able to have a day off on Wednesday. This was also made feasible by the fact some of our colleagues who had been unable to come into work over the weekend had returned on the Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday, bringing a renewed wave of energy. Work continued in the Reid Building and McLellan Galleries to sort and list items. Some glass negatives had received water damage so these were laid out to dry under the supervision of a conservator. A lot of the small objects which had been removed from the building on Monday were now dry enough to be packed and sent to off-site storage and most of the paper archives were almost dry by this point. Wednesday allowed us to consolidate the pages of records sheets we had created in listing all water affected objects which had been moved out of The Mack and to assess what our next steps needed to be.

### **Thursday 29 May**

Although we had feared that the Mackintosh Building was going to be closed up on the Wednesday, it actually remained open for the remainder of the week. With several staff re-

energised after a day's rest we were able to return to the building and remove even more items, namely large pieces of furniture and a number of oil paintings which were located throughout the building and which had been too difficult to remove at short notice earlier in the week. We were also able to move some of our collection of large plaster casts from the West (fire-affected area) to the East side of the building. This was done by companies Belfor and Kerr respectively under the supervision of an Archives and Collections team member, Michelle Kaye.

Some small plaster casts had also been left in the sub-basement store as they were too heavy to easily remove. With more time on our hands, these were removed by Historic Scotland staff and laid out to dry on wooden supports in McLellan Galleries. As mentioned previously in this article, the decant work progressed from dealing with the very vulnerable objects which were easy to retrieve to more stable objects that required more planning before removal. It should be reiterated here that the progress of this work was very much affected by what we were able to do each day and the need to be flexible is something we've very much learnt from our experience of recovery work.

### **Friday 30 May – Friday 07 June**

A week on from the date of the fire, nearly all of GSA's historical collections had been removed from the Mackintosh Building. Only the large plaster casts remained (it was decided that moving them out of the building could potentially cause more damage than leaving them inside), along with a handful of very large furniture items and some fixtures and fittings which couldn't easily be removed. Despite the stressful nature of recent events the fire recovery had really brought people together and there was overall a very positive mood and sense of pride in the way colleagues and our institution had coped. As Jocelyn Grant, Archives and Collections Assistant states:

At first I thought we would not be able to get into the building for weeks, and I expected the recovery to be a depressing process of removing heavily damaged archival items that could have been saved had we been allowed in sooner. My actual experience was a much more uplifting one. Although items had been damaged, the majority remained remarkably intact, and the response that the school received from volunteers and staff who were so immediately willing to give their time and expertise to help with the process, was truly inspiring.

One area of the recovery which had been difficult to manage alongside the hands-on recovery work was communication with the public and with fellow professionals. From the moment the news broke about the fire we had received a huge number of messages of support and offers of help. This was very much appreciated, but also slightly overwhelming and for the first few days we

were very restricted as to how many external people we could have on-site. However, by the 30 May we knew that we would need assistance barcoding and listing the dry material which had been removed to the McLellan Galleries before it was sent to off-site storage (without this work it would be very difficult to retrieve individual items in the future), and I was able to contact Kiara King (Glasgow Area Disaster Planning Network), Ben Bennett (Scottish Council on Archives) and Rob Thomson (Icon) to ask for their help in organizing volunteers for the following week. As a result of this, GADPN arranged for c.8 volunteers to work each day Tuesday (3 June) to Friday (6 June), providing us with a rota of volunteers, their names and contact details. Some things we needed to consider in order to facilitate this work included:

- Where and who the volunteers should report to – we also needed volunteers to bring ID due to security checks
- What sort of clothes to wear / conditions to expect
- What IT equipment we needed to provide
- What breaks and refreshments the volunteers would require

During the following week the volunteers organized by GADPN helped us to add barcodes to each plan chest drawer or archive box stored in McLellans and then to note this number in a spreadsheet alongside the reference number of the material it related to. Volunteers worked in pairs with laptops and boxes were stacked on pallets as they were listed so that they would be ready for shrink wrapping and pick-up by Constantines who were taking them to off-site storage. Each pallet was also given a number and this was again noted in the spreadsheet. Since the recovery we have returned a number of key collections to the GSA campus. Although sorting through pallets to find boxes isn't a very quick process, the spreadsheets created by the volunteers have allowed us to locate material that otherwise would have been virtually inaccessible due to a lack of location information. The volunteers were an incredibly efficient group and actually completed the work by the end of the Thursday evening. I think many of them expected to be handling dirty or damaged material and were quite surprised at the condition of the items they were working with. We were very grateful to all of the volunteers for helping us to undertake this task at a much faster pace than our own staff resources would have allowed and we hope that they may have also found the experience useful. Former Glasgow University Masters Student Susan Yule has noted,

It was an informative experience to be involved in the recovery process and it was good to be able to help out in the aftermath of the fire. It was also useful to meet other volunteers

with diverse archive and records management backgrounds, and to learn from their experiences.

As during the previous week, working alongside each other towards a common goal seemed to create a very positive atmosphere. By this point the GSA campus had reopened and this allowed us to feed our volunteers at the students union who provided a buffet lunch each day. This break was a good opportunity to recharge batteries and helped to keep up our spirits. Many of the volunteers have since mentioned to me how good they remember the food was!

During this week the Archives and Collections were also allocated office space within the main Library building so we could begin to undertake some desk-based tasks alongside continuing to check and pack textiles (this work continued into July as many of the textiles took a long time to fully dry-out), and overseeing the barcoding and listing work at McLellan Galleries. The team started to type up the many handwritten lists we had made recording objects and their movements out of the Mackintosh to the Reid for drying, or to Harwells for freezing, or to off-site storage. This was a fairly complicated process as the handwritten sheets had been compiled by a number of individuals and, as previously mentioned, because a large number of the items had been separated from their reference numbers, or indeed were uncatalogued (our cataloguing backlog shelf was in the store that had suffered water damage). Many of these objects had simply been described and although some descriptions were easy to recognize and/or relate to our catalogue<sup>4</sup> (for example we only have one blue ceramic rabbit), others were more complicated (we have a number of metal busts of men!). This process however, gave us a starting point to work from and provided a general overview of what had gone to storage.

The importance of labelling directly onto items (for example a large number of our textiles had labels sewn into them) and of having up-to-date catalogue records was highlighted by our experience of trying to keep track of our collections once they had moved out of the store. Re-labelling and cataloguing work will therefore play a key part in our recovery programme, alongside conservation work. Digitisation is another aspect of our long-term recovery plans. In some cases digital images helped us to identify items that had lost their reference number, and in other cases (particularly in relation to our oil painting collection which was largely destroyed in the fire), the

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<sup>4</sup>Prior to the fire recovery we had been working on an online catalogue project and although this data wasn't live yet, staff were able to use it to match up some descriptions with reference numbers. This catalogue is now available to view at [www.gsa.ac.uk/archives](http://www.gsa.ac.uk/archives)

digital version of these artworks are all that we now have left and therefore provide important documentary evidence of items that have been lost.

By Thursday 6 June the Archives and Collections had begun to tackle our email backlog, starting with updates and thank you messages via archives mailing lists such as Scotarch. The recovery process highlighted the generosity of the archive, museum and conservation communities, and the wealth of experience in the Glasgow area. It also confirmed the importance of building good relationships with suppliers and external companies who could be called on at short notice.

### **Conclusion**

We are now in the process of re-building and conserving our holdings. However, the fire will leave a lasting impact on The Mackintosh Building and on our heritage collections. Sadly some areas of the building and our holdings were severely damaged by this incident, for example the Mackintosh Library interior and our oil painting and furniture collections, whilst other areas received water damage, particularly our textile collections and some of our paper archives and smaller artefacts. However, a large amount of our holdings were relatively unaffected by the fire, including the majority of our paper-based archives and artworks.

The removal of our surviving holdings from the building was prioritized by taking into consideration their vulnerability and their value (in monetary and in research terms), as well as the practicalities of being able to access and move certain items. The Archives and Collections team's knowledge of their holdings greatly aided this task. However, in some cases the loss of labels (due to damaged packaging) hindered our ability to keep track of object movements. Our experience in this area has prompted us to investigate and implement new packaging and labelling procedures which will accompany a programme of cataloguing and digitisation work.

The School received overwhelming offers of support from the archives, museum and conservation communities and much of the recovery work could not have been undertaken as successfully as it was without the expertise and sheer manpower of individuals from Historic Scotland, the National Records of Scotland, Glasgow Museums, Glasgow University and the Glasgow Area Disaster Planning Network (not to mention the many other individuals who gave their time and knowledge). This has shown us the benefit of having strong relationships with our professional

bodies and with colleagues in other institutions. Receiving such support was also a huge boost to staff morale.

The Library and the Archives and Collections teams had undertaken disaster preparedness activities prior to the fire. The areas of this work which we found to be particularly useful were: having an up-to-date contact list of conservators and suppliers; having a basic how-to guide on dealing with water damaged material; being a subscriber to Harwell Restoration Services; and being a member of the Glasgow Area Disaster Planning Network. Having insurance in place for our holdings also greatly aided our ability to undertake work with some confidence that money was available to pay for this. It has since allowed us to undertake planning work (such as conservation surveys) for our future recovery activities (although discussions with our insurance company about our overall claim are still taking place).

One of the things we have learnt from our experience is that recovering from a major incident takes a lot of time. This article has only outlined the recovery activities which happened during the two weeks immediately after the Mackintosh Building fire. For approximately four months after this period we were still sorting, packing and labelling material to move into storage and it was only after six months that we were able to re-establish an enquiry service or physical access to our holdings for visitors. At the present time we are still only able to offer a limited service for users, although we aim to have a new fully-functional reading room in place before the start of GSA's next academic year 2015/16.

Communication has been an important aspect of the recovery process. During the initial salvage operation, it was difficult to keep on top of communications alongside the hands-on recovery work. In future we would consider identifying a specific member of staff to take on this task. However, since this time we have tried to keep our users and fellow professionals updated about our progress via our blog and articles in the archives and museums press. We realize that reduction in our physical presence (particularly for GSA students and staff) may result in a decline in use or awareness of our holdings and activities, and that there is a genuine interest in what has happened and how we are managing. In 2014 (before the fire) GSA opened a new visitor centre in the Reid Building containing a permanent display drawing on the School's archives and collections and telling the story of GSA's heritage and the Mackintosh Building. In December of the same year, we were able to launch a new online catalogue (the first time our catalogue had been available in

this way) including a large number of images of our holdings. The ability to keep in touch with users via these alternative spaces (physical and virtual) has been hugely important while we work towards re-establishing our reading room facilities.

Almost a year on from the fire we have now stabilised all of our surviving collections and drawn-up plans for the next three years of our recovery work. Two new members of staff have been appointed to work on this project, allowing for other Archives and Collections team members to carry on with our core activities and ensure our holdings remain as accessible as possible to researchers. A lot of work still remains to be done, however we are confident that this can be achieved and our experiences so far have shown us that we have huge support from our users and our fellow professionals.

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Glasgow City Council

Glasgow Life

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Harwell Document Restoration Services

Historic Scotland

John Dewar and Sons Ltd

Museums Galleries Scotland

National Galleries of Scotland

National Records of Scotland

Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow

Scottish Council on Archives

Strathclyde University  
University of Glasgow

Salvador Alcántara Peláez

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Michelle Craig

Emma Dadson

Stephanie Fair

Sarah Foskett

Iain Fox

Kate French

Michael Gallagher

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Louise Robertson  
Nick Sanders  
Graeme Scott  
Jacqui Seargeant  
Lauren Simpson  
Victoria Stobo  
Gordon Stocks  
Karen Thompson  
James Thorburn  
Colin Vernall  
Richard Welander  
Sophie Younger  
Susan Yule

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**End notes:**

The quotes contained in this article have been taken from responses to a questionnaire which was sent out to individuals involved in Archives and Collections recovery work.

**Image credits:**

- Figure 1: The Mackintosh Building on Fire (photograph © Theresa Moermanib)
- Figure 2: Material being moved from the Mackintosh Building (photograph © Mark Sutherland HEMDIA)
- Figure 3: Textiles laid out to dry in the Reid building (photograph © mcateer photograph)
- Figure 4: Moving plasters casts from the West to the East half of the Mackintosh Building (photograph © mcateer photograph)
- Figure 5: Barcoded and shrink-wrapped boxes ready for uplift (photograph © The Glasgow School of Art)