

**CHARLES RENNIE MACINTOSH**  
*a Scottish architect, designer, watercolourist and sculptor*

(Angie Rogers – U3A Art Appreciation Group + notes from Wikipedia & other online sources)

1868 June 7<sup>th</sup> Charles Rennie Mackintosh was born at 70 Parson Street Glasgow on 7 June 1868. He was the fourth out of five children and the second son to William and Margaret Mackintosh. He was dyslexic and, having been born with a contracted sinew in one foot, walked with a limp. His father worked in the police force. He wanted to be an artist as well as an architect. The young Charles attended Reid's Public School and the Allan Glen's Institution. From the age of 16 he studied at the School of Art. His mother died when he was only 17 and his father married again. London at the time was full of Arts and Crafts. Glasgow was called "The Athens of the North".



1884 Charles Rennie Mackintosh joined the Glasgow School of Art where he also met his future wife Margaret Macdonald – they were both members of the collaborative group known as "The Four", the two married in 1902. The Mackintosh group "The Immortals" or "Spooks" were very interested in meanings. "Art is the flower, Life is the green leaf" wrote Macintosh. Macintosh was actually already engaged to Jessie Keppie when he met Margaret – daughter of his boss!

1889 Charles Rennie Mackintosh joined the firm of Honeyman and Keppie – by then Glasgow's architecture had become more pluralist or varied. During his time with the firm, Charles Rennie Mackintosh refined his architectural style.

1890 Mackintosh was the second winner of the Alexander Thomson Travelling Studentship, set up for the "furtherance of the study of ancient classic architecture, with special reference to the principles illustrated in Mr. Thomson's works." Before he left he gave a lecture on the Scottish Baronial Style of architecture. Upon his return, he resumed with the Honeyman and Keppie architectural practice.

1896 Charles Rennie Mackintosh won a competition to design new art school for the Glasgow School of Art – the Governors insisted that it should be a plain building. Macintosh looked north into the vernacular styles of his own Scotland. It remains now unchanged – he designed everything to serve the artist and it still does. There is a strong influence of his interest in Japan and also in monasteries. There is a suspended library. Nature is everywhere. There is a great sense of light. It is a "discontinuous free style of art".

1897-1899 The first section of the new [Glasgow School of Art](#) is built

1900 Charles Rennie Mackintosh married Margaret Macdonald in the summer but didn't honeymoon as he was going to Vienna to work with a renowned group of Artist Designers there - he was feted there. They toasted "Our Master Mackintosh" --- you who have shown us the way (regarding holistic designing for the whole house). This gave him an enormous confidence boost. Did he pick things up from the Viennese or were they influenced by him?

1901 Competition entry "Haus eines Kunstfreundes" ([House for an Artlover](#))  
This was built in 1996 in fact as a living tribute to Macintosh.

1902-1904 The [Hill House](#) in Helensburgh was built for Walter Blackie, the publisher, who gave him control over designing his home. 40 years later Blackie remembered Mackintosh's attention to detail as something unusual for 1904 – electricity, water and art.

*Macintosh saw things differently – he was not typical of Victorian architects. He was a modern man – ahead of his time. In 1900, he was immensely famous but then there was a great period when no-one took any notice of him.*

*Miss Catherine Cranston came to his aid – doyenne of Glasgow tea rooms – she believed Macintosh could give something special and different to her suites of tea rooms. He did not fail her! Everything from uniforms, to hatstands – every item of decoration was down to Macintosh. He needed to have complete control and received it.*

1903 He designed the Willow Tea Rooms in Sauchiehall Street for Miss Cranston – the Willow Leaf motif predominated throughout. This was the first time that Macintosh played with space – everything had to be real space; no sham ceilings etc.

1904 Mackintosh designed the chancel furniture in [Holy Trinity Church](#), Bridge of Allan

1904 Charles Rennie Mackintosh became a partner of Honeyman and Keppie



1903-1907 Scotland Street School was his last commission in Glasgow – he was beginning to be seen as too odd and individual.

1907-1909 The second section of the [Glasgow School of Art](#) was built

1910-1911 There were rumours that he did not keep to deadlines and was moody and some contend that Macintosh drank heavily at this time. He was seen as just too individual. He fell into a long depression, developed pneumonia and his recovery was slow.

1913 When economic hardships were causing many architectural practices to close, he resigned from Honeyman and Keppie and attempted to open his own practice.

1914 Unable to sustain his office, Mackintosh and his wife took an extended holiday in Suffolk as his depression had turned into pneumonia and it was common to feel that sea air would be beneficial. There he created many floral watercolours which are now famous.

1915 The Mackintoshes returned briefly to Scotland and then moved to London where Charles continued to paint and create textile designs.

*The Macintoshes never had any children – not for want of trying -Margaret visited many obstetricians. Their own home was where they could work together in a totally unfettered way – this is now a museum.*

1916 He received a commission to redesign the home of W.J. Bassett-Lowke at [78 Derngate](#) in Northampton – This undertaking would be his last architectural and interior design project. The house is now open to the public.

*Mackintosh became isolated as an architect and exile had already taken place in his mind.*

1923-1927 Due to financial hardship, the Mackintoshes moved to Port-Vendres, a Mediterranean coastal town in southern France with a warm climate that was a comparably cheaper location in which to live. During this peaceful phase of his life, Charles Rennie Mackintosh created a large portfolio of some 41 architecture and landscape watercolour paintings. The paintings are placid – Macintosh transmuted his sadness into a declaration of love – for Margaret, for his surroundings, for his art. He was earning less than a navy for his paintings but could control his anger about that now. Margaret went back to London to consult doctors and he wrote to her almost every day, missing her terribly.

The couple remained in France for five years, before being forced to return to London in 1927 due to illness.

1928 Charles Rennie Mackintosh died in London on Dec 10<sup>th</sup> – he'd developed cancer of the tongue in 1927 (possibly because of his heavy smoking) and his tongue was removed. He came out of hospital wearing a radium collar. He lived in London in rooms and sat under a willow tree in the garden. Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh lived on for another 4 years. She never talked about her husband but used to return to the French area every year where she used to sit with "Toshy".

## Design Influences



***The Room de Luxe at The Willow Tearooms*** features furniture and interior design by Mackintosh and Margaret Macdonald.

He lived most of his life in the city of Glasgow. Located by the margins of the River Clyde, during the Industrial Revolution the city had one of the greatest production centres of heavy engineering and shipbuilding in the world. As the city grew and prospered, a faster response to the high demand for consumer goods and arts was necessary. Industrialized, mass-produced items started to gain popularity. Along with the Industrial Revolution, Asian style and emerging modernist ideas also influenced Mackintosh's designs. When the Japanese isolationist regime softened, shipyards building at the River Clyde were exposed to Japanese navy and training engineers; Glasgow's link with the eastern country became particularly close. Japanese design became more accessible and gained great popularity.

This style was admired by Mackintosh because of: its restraint and economy of means rather than ostentatious accumulation; its simple forms and natural materials rather than elaboration and artifice; the use of texture and light and shadow rather than pattern and ornament.

In the old western style furniture was seen as ornament that displayed the wealth of its owner and the value of the piece was established according to the length of time spent creating it. In the Japanese arts furniture and design focused on the quality of the space, which was meant to evoke a calming and organic feeling to the interior.



***Scotland Street School Glasgow***

At the same time a new philosophy concerned with creating functional and practical design was emerging throughout Europe: the so-called "modernist ideas". The main concept of the Modernist movement was to develop innovative ideas and new technology: design concerned with the present and the future, rather than with history and tradition. Heavy ornamentation and inherited styles were discarded. Even though Mackintosh became known as the 'pioneer' of the movement, his designs were far removed from the bleak utilitarianism of Modernism. His concern was to build around the needs of people: people seen, not as masses, but as individuals who needed not a machine for living in but a work of art. Mackintosh took his inspiration from his Scottish upbringing and blended them with the flourish of Art Nouveau and the simplicity of Japanese forms.

While working in architecture, Charles Rennie Mackintosh developed his own style: a contrast between strong right angles and floral-inspired decorative motifs with subtle curves, e.g. the Mackintosh Rose motif, along with some references to traditional Scottish architecture. The project that helped make his international reputation was the Glasgow School of Art (1897–1909). During the early stages of the Glasgow School of Art Mackintosh also completed the Queen's Cross Church project in Maryhill, Glasgow. This is considered to be one of Charles Rennie Mackintosh most mysterious projects. It is the only church by the Glasgow born artist to be built and is now the Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society headquarters. Like his contemporary Frank Lloyd Wright, Mackintosh's architectural designs often included extensive specifications for the detailing, decoration, and furnishing of his buildings. The majority if not all of this detailing and significant contributions to his architectural drawings were



***"The Lighthouse",  
Charles Mackintosh's  
Glasgow Herald building***

designed and detailed by his wife Margaret Macdonald whom Charles had met when they both attended the Glasgow School of Art. His work was shown at the Vienna Secession Exhibition in 1900. Mackintosh's architectural career was a relatively short one, but of significant quality and impact. All his major commissions were between 1896 and 1906, where he designed private homes, commercial buildings, interior renovations, churches, and furniture.



***Hill House, Helensburgh, near Glasgow***

## NOTED ARCHITECTURAL WORKS

## *Windyhill, Kilmacolm*

- Windyhill, Kilmacolm
- Hill House, Helensburgh (National Trust for Scotland)
- House for an Art Lover, Glasgow
- The Mackintosh House (interior design, reconstructed with original furniture and fittings at the Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery, Glasgow)
- Queen's Cross Church, Glasgow
- Ruchill Church Hall, Glasgow
- Holy Trinity Church, Bridge of Allan, Stirling
- Scotland Street School, Glasgow, now Scotland Street School Museum.
- The Willow Tearooms, Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow; one of Miss Cranston's Tearooms
- Hous'hill, interior design of the home of Catherine Cranston and her husband John Cochrane (demolished, furniture in collections)
- Glasgow School of Art, Glasgow
- Craigie Hall, Glasgow
- Martyrs' Public School, Glasgow
- The Royal Highland Fusiliers Regimental Museum, Glasgow
- Former Daily Record offices, Glasgow
- Former Glasgow Herald offices in Mitchell Street, now The Lighthouse – Scotland's Centre for Architecture, Design and the City
- 78 Derngate, Northampton (interior design and architectural remodelling for Wenman Joseph Bassett-Lowke, founder of Bassett-Lowke)
- 5 The Drive, Northampton (for Bassett-Lowke's brother-in-law)



## UNBUILT DESIGNS

Although moderately popular (for a period) in his native Scotland, most of his more ambitious designs were not built. His designs of various buildings for the 1901 Glasgow International Exhibition were not constructed, neither was his "Haus eines Kunstfreundes" (Art Lover's House) of the same year.

He competed in the 1903 design competition for Liverpool Cathedral, but lost the commission to Giles Gilbert Scott.

The House for An Art Lover was built after his death (1989–1996).

Mackintosh left many unbuilt designs:

- Railway Terminus, Concert Hall, Alternative Concert Hall, Bar and Dining Room, Exhibition Hall, Science and Art Museum, Chapter House, Liverpool Cathedral – Anglican Cathedral competition entry

Although Mackintosh's architectural output was fairly small he had a considerable influence on European design. Especially popular in Austria and Germany, Mackintosh's work was highly acclaimed when it was shown at the Vienna Secession Exhibition in 1900. It was also exhibited in Budapest, Munich, Dresden, Venice and Moscow.



*The Fort, c. 1925–1926. Fort Maily,  
a ruined 16th century fortification on the outskirts of Port Vendres*

## **DESIGN WORK AND PAINTINGS**

### **The Four**

Charles Rennie Mackintosh attended evening classes in art at the Glasgow School of Art. It was at these classes that he first met his future wife Margaret MacDonald, her sister Frances MacDonald, and Herbert MacNair who was also a fellow apprentice with Mackintosh at Honeyman and Keppie. MacNair and Frances would also marry. These close companions would later be known as the collaborative group "The Four", prominent members of the "Glasgow School" movement.

This group of artists exhibited in Glasgow, London and Vienna, and these exhibitions helped establish Mackintosh's reputation. The so-called "Glasgow" style was exhibited in Europe and influenced the Viennese Art Nouveau movement known as Sezessionstil (in English, The Secession) around 1900. Mackintosh also worked in interior design, furniture, textiles and metalwork. Much of this work

combines Mackintosh's own designs with those of his wife, whose flowing, floral style complemented his more formal, rectilinear work.

Later in life, disillusioned with architecture, Mackintosh worked largely as a water colourist, painting numerous landscapes and flower studies (often in collaboration with Margaret, with whose style Mackintosh's own gradually converged) in the Suffolk village of Walberswick (to which the pair moved in 1914), and where he was arrested as a possible spy in 1915.

By 1923, he had entirely abandoned architecture and design and moved to the south of France with Margaret where he concentrated on watercolour painting. He was interested in the relationships between man-made and naturally occurring landscapes. Many of his paintings depict Port Vendres, a small port near the Spanish border, and the nearby landscapes.

Mackintosh's designs gained in popularity in the decades following his death. His House for an Art Lover was finally built in Glasgow's Bellahouston Park in 1996, and the University of Glasgow (which owns the majority of his watercolour work) rebuilt the interiors of a terraced house Mackintosh had designed, and furnished it with his and Margaret's work (it is part of the University's Hunterian Museum). The Glasgow School of Art building (now renamed "The Mackintosh Building") is regularly cited by architectural critics as among the very finest buildings in the UK. The Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society tries to encourage a greater awareness of the work of Mackintosh as an important architect, artist and designer. The rediscovery of Mackintosh as a significant figure in design is attributed by some to the designation of Glasgow as European City of Culture in 1990,[6] and the exhibition of his work which accompanied the year-long festival. His enduring popularity since then has been fuelled by further exhibitions and the many books and other memorabilia which have illustrated various aspects of his life and work. This revival of public interest in Mackintosh has, in turn, led to the refurbishing and opening of further buildings to the public, such as the Willow Tea Rooms, Glasgow and Derngate, Northampton.



Charles Rennie Mackintosh was to be commemorated on a new series of banknotes issued by the Clydesdale Bank in 2009; his image appeared on the new issue of £100 notes.

***The front (north) CM Mackintosh's Glasgow School of Art on Renfrew Street, Garnethill in Glasgow, Scotland.***