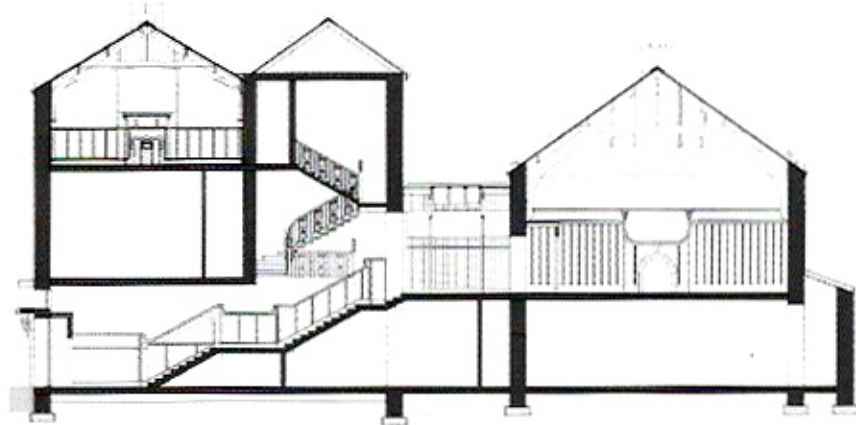


# Mackintosh Club, Helensburgh



Many CRM Society members have already visited the former Conservative Club in Helensburgh in the 10 months since Puregreenspace Architects took possession of the top floor. Here, owners Nicola and Bruce Jamieson tell us about the steady progress being made to restore and protect the building for generations to come. Now rebranded as the 'Mackintosh Club,' the pigeon-infested mess of the last 60 years has become a distant memory.

Fundamental to the long-term restoration of the building has been a strategy to redesign a section of roof that has caused ingress and to add a stair to the roof to enable easy maintenance, which has just received planning permission. All the historic and recognisable features of the building will be completely untouched by these alterations, albeit safeguarded by better protection from the elements. The design of the new section of roof takes its inspiration from Mackintosh's love for the ziggurat and also makes reference to his own careful modifications at The Glasgow School of Art. There, the first phase was completed in 1899, and when the second phase got underway in 1907 he replaced the sloping roof of phase one with the now familiar square boxed studios, connected along the rear with the famous

'hen run' - one of the more imaginative parts of his design. At the Mackintosh Club the roof in question sits concealed in the centre of the building, neither visible from Sinclair Street to the front or Maitland Street to the rear.

Four enlarged landings on the new stair will provide a symbolic gallery space housing a permanent homage to the Glasgow Four, who were coming to public prominence at the time the building was being designed and erected. The stair will culminate in a roof-top terrace that literally 'connects to the sky' providing breath-taking views over Helensburgh and the surrounding hills and lochs. Being offset to the rear, the stair and gallery will serve neatly as an auxiliary space to the former billiard room which will remain frozen in time as an early Mackintosh masterpiece. By day it will be a place for visitors and club members to sit and reflect, read the library books, enjoy the piano and indulge in tea and cakes. In the evening, it will be available for private hire - a unique experience for dining, small performances and receptions.

The 'Mackintosh Club Rooms' - a new charity - is being set up to preserve and safeguard the entire building. Its strong board of professionals and Mackintosh experts will embark on a fundraising

Section through the former Conservative Club, Helensburgh. Image © Puregreenspace Architects



3D view of the Mackintosh Club. Image © Puregreenspace Architects

programme to implement the conservation plan and proposed alterations. To date the project has been funded entirely by Nicola and Bruce Jamieson. Visitors and donations to the Mackintosh Club are very welcome.

For more information email [nicola@mackintosh.club](mailto:nicola@mackintosh.club)

## Glasgow City Heritage Trust has invested substantially in the built heritage of Alexander 'Greek' Thomson over the past 10 years.

GCHT has awarded numerous grants through several funding programmes including building repairs, shop front and heritage grant schemes. Most notably, it supported the major works at 1-10 Moray Place, one of the finest 19th century terraces in Scotland and where Thomson lived until his death in 1875. The Trust contributed to the full restoration works of the terrace at Strathbungo on the south side of Glasgow, including roof, stone and

window repairs plus the reinstatement of railings and lamps to restore the building to its original splendour.

Torsten Haak, Director of Glasgow City Heritage Trust said: "We are happy to be part of the Thomson bicentenary celebrations of the city. We are currently funding major works in Thomson's Walmer Crescent, which is one of four conservation areas in Glasgow targeted for special support."



Torsten Haak, Director of Glasgow City Heritage Trust

For more information on Glasgow City Heritage Trust visit [www.glasgowheritage.org.uk](http://www.glasgowheritage.org.uk)

# Alexander Thomson 1817-1875

Mark Baines BArch DipArch of the Mackintosh School of Architecture gives an account of one of Glasgow's most important architects as the city marks Thomson's bicentenary

This year is the bicentenary of the birth of Alexander Thomson, one of Glasgow's greatest 19th-century architects.

Few architects, before or after, were as skilled in the art of abstraction which would lead to the unprecedented levels of architectural thinking, innovation and originality of Thomson's buildings. Much of his work is as startling in its appearance today as it was when built.

Sadly, many of his buildings were destroyed in the post-war restructuring of the city, especially his tenements in Laurieston and Hutchesontown. Of his four churches only St Vincent Street Church survives. Forty out of some 120 buildings now remain. Holmwood is under the protection of the National Trust for Scotland while St Vincent Street Church is only open by arrangement, the remainder being in private ownership. Unfortunately, even today, the Egyptian Halls in Union Street, Glasgow remains under severe threat of destruction.

Born in Balfour, Alexander Thomson moved to Glasgow aged 12, became a lawyer's apprentice then joined the architectural firm of Robert Foote who introduced him to the world of classical architecture. Thereafter he worked with John Baird 1, an occasionally innovative architect and was then joined by his brother-in-law, also John Baird. In 1850 he established the practice of A & G Thomson with his brother George. Following the latter's departure for Africa, Thomson engaged John Turnbull who was responsible for the completion of works following Thomson's death in 1875. Throughout this period Thomson was undoubtedly the leading design protagonist.

Thomson's early works are sometimes hesitant, though distinctive forays into a variety of architectural styles are evident



Facade of the Egyptian Halls, Union Street, Glasgow. Image © GSA

in an early series of villas and terraces in Glasgow and its environs. However Tor House, Rothesay, the Double Villa, Langside, and Caledonia Road Church, Hutchesontown, all designed between 1855 and 1856 marked the emergence of his totally assured, if not radically orientated, design approach. The four churches aside a major public commission such as the University eluded him. Instead he designed numerous villas and terraces in Glasgow's inner suburbs and many tenements and commercial buildings in the city centre. It is an architecture which defines, belongs and is committed to the street, and, in a similar fashion to the diagonal approaches to the villas, the buildings are consciously intended to be viewed obliquely. Like the marble Grecian monuments which he so admired, Thomson only ever built in stone resulting in a wide range of buildings which combine a sense of mass associated with the monolithic qualities of masonry to instil varying degrees of monumentality. There is also delight and ingenuity in the highly controlled compositional artistry of light and shadow by means of repetition and detailed invention. In this sense it was

a quintessentially urban architecture which lived and breathed the gridded expanses of the burgeoning industrial city

Thomson was not a neo-classicist but in recognising the futility of archaeological reconstruction of past structures he expressively reinvigorated the essential elements of classical architecture consisting of the wall, column and beam, forging an ever varied contemporary language that was singularly compelling and one which was uniquely his own. His was a language genuinely striving for a modern architecture within the culture of his day and one with the capacity to encompass the full range of building types. Amongst his greatest architectural achievements not previously mentioned are Ellisland, Moray Place, Great Western Terrace and the lost Queens Park Church and Eglinton Street tenement, known as Queens Park Terrace. As a consequence of Thomson's rigorous approach, his architecture, when considered as a holistic body of work, appears to contain a sensibility, generosity and integrity that confers equal dignity on all aspects and peoples of an urban society

For more information about Alexander Thomson, the Alexander Thomson Society and the Bicentenary events please contact [www.alexanderthomsonsociety.org.uk](http://www.alexanderthomsonsociety.org.uk)