

# THE GLASGOW SCHOOL OF ART

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GEORGE WALTON'S SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO THE  
GLASGOW STYLE SHOULD CHALLENGE THE PREVALENT  
BIAS TOWARDS CHARLES RENWIE MACKINTOSH.

NICOLA PERRETO

**George Walton's significant contribution to the Glasgow Style should challenge the prevalent bias towards Charles Rennie Mackintosh**

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Glasgow School of Art



George Walton's significant contribution to the Glasgow Style should challenge the prevalent bias towards Charles Rennie Mackintosh

Present day critics reviewing the Glasgow Style simply conclude the "creator and indisputable master of the Glasgow Style was Charles Rennie Mackintosh. There was no more progressive architect or designer working in Britain."<sup>1</sup> However, the achievements of his associate George Walton can challenge this bold statement, even though historians rarely award him more than a footnote in the numerous publications listing the achievements of Mackintosh. This paper will address this bias against Walton and provide an objective analysis of his contributions to the Glasgow Style.

George Walton began life as a bank clerk but during his employment his aspirations for a different career promoted attendance at evening classes at the Glasgow School of Art. This experience corresponded with the artistic influences of his family and encouraged Miss Cranston to commission Walton to redesign the Argyle Street tearooms in 1888. This prompted the young designer to establish a firm in interior design, which rapidly diversified to specialise in furniture design and stained glass. Walton prospered and in 1896 he collaborated with the Rowntree family on several tearoom projects in Scarborough. Miss Cranston subsequently commissioned further work at Buchanan Street and Argyle Street tearooms, but this time in collaboration with Mackintosh. However, Walton's prosperity in

- SPELL OUT NAME, SAY WHO SHE WAS  
- ALSO, DO WE KNOW HOW HE GOT THIS?  
IF NOT, SAY THAT

<sup>1</sup> Larner, Gerald and Celia. The Glasgow Style. Paul Harris Publishing. Edinburgh, 1979, page 1



Glasgow did not last and in 1897 he moved to London. The catalyst was likely the commission from George Davison for a series of Eastman Kodak showrooms in London, Brussels, Milan, Vienna and Moscow, which brought international fame.

In 1903 Walton resigned from his company to practice exclusively as an architect.

WHERE DATES?  
He completed numerous projects, the first being The Leys, later followed by The White House, considered his greatest achievement. Throughout his career, James Whistler and William Morris were great inspirations, encouraging creative innovations and helping Walton to pioneer the distinctive Glasgow Style.

The Glasgow Style ran from circa 1890-1920, and promotion in its early years was of paramount importance. Glasgow's economic prosperity and image as an "aggressively modern city"<sup>2</sup> at the end of the nineteenth century inspired a "broadening of the social, educational and aesthetic directions"<sup>3</sup> and resulted in distinctive contributions to the Art Nouveau movement, particularly in architecture, interior design and painting. Art Nouveau was appealing because it "rejected the order of straight line...in favour of a more natural movement."<sup>4</sup> However, the new style did not have an established manifesto and its development "embraced all the arts,"<sup>5</sup> <sup>IN THIS CASE</sup> dependent on the group of influential modern designers who had training within the Glasgow School of Art. The support of the school's director, Francis

<sup>2</sup> Brett, David. C.R. Mackintosh: The Poetics of Workmanship. Reaktion Books Limited. London, 1992, page 112

<sup>3</sup> Birkhauser, Jude. Glasgow Girls: Women in Art and Design 1880-1920. Canongate Publishing Limited. Edinburgh, 1990, page 19

<sup>4</sup> Hardy, William. A Guide to Art Nouveau Style. Apple Press Ltd. London, 1987, page 8

<sup>5</sup> Wilhide, Elizabeth. The Mackintosh Style: Design and Decor. Chronicle Books. United States, 1995, page 48



Newbery, from 1885 to 1918, provided the "critical and social approval"<sup>6</sup> required by the new movement.

There were three key influences to the Glasgow Style: William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement, Whistler and the Aesthetic movement, and Japanese art with its coordinated interiors and simple elongated forms. The iconic organic motifs widely used by the <sup>SE</sup> designers were stylised interpretations of traditional Scottish form and Celtic imagery. The movement became iconic for its strong visual tension created by soaring vertical lines offset against subtly elegant curves and soft colours. Designers regarded an exhibition of the Arts and Crafts in 1896 as the first opportunity that "introduced the work of Glasgow designers to the English Arts and Crafts Movement"<sup>7</sup> but unfortunately, the style had a limited sphere of influence and by the 1920s was no longer popular. The First World War appeared to renew emphasis on tradition and people became wary of anything extravagant.

↳ BUT DECO/MODERNISM ARE IN VOICE.

In this way, it would seem that the tamer, "more commercially orientated <sup>MEANING?</sup> products"<sup>8</sup> achieved more popularity. Karen Moon supports this and believes the movement's significant achievement was its contribution to interior design. In this manner, Walton's early work in the Glasgow Style is an important aspect in the significance of his contribution.

<sup>6</sup> Billcliffe, Roger. The Glasgow Boys: The Glasgow School of Painting 1875-1895. John Murray (Publishers) Ltd. London, 1985, page 11

<sup>7</sup> Atfield, Judy and Kirkham, Pat. A View from the Interior: Feminism Women and Design. The Women's Press Limited. London, 1989, page 169

<sup>8</sup> Wilder, Judith. The Glasgow Style 1890-1920. The Department of Decorative Art. Glasgow Museums and Art Galleries. Glasgow, 1984, page 8



Walton's chairs were an influential progression in design and became important in achieving unity in his schemes. This was crucial in promoting the new style in these early years. Walton's simple yet elegant designs earned great acceptance, whereas Mackintosh's contemporaries were wary of his radical ideas. However, it is likely that a lack of formal training overwhelmed Walton's confidence, hindering his defence against Mackintosh's talents. This ambivalent relationship between the designers was evident during their tearoom collaboration where Walton appeared willing to overlook his work in favour of the projects' success. This is not to say that Walton's greater experience did not influence Mackintosh, and there is reason to suggest that the collaboration inspired the iconic high-backed chair design.

Nevertheless, Mackintosh's radical designs have claimed legacy of the Glasgow Style. Despite Mackintosh's apparent fame, there have been moments of acclaim for Walton. Nikolaus Pevsner's publication in 1936, 'Pioneers of the Modern Movement' withdrew its conclusion that Art Nouveau's only British contribution came from Mackintosh, in argument that "Walton's name should never have been left out"<sup>9</sup> as a pioneer of the modern movement. The editor of *Architectural Review*, John Betjeman,<sup>10</sup> also claimed Walton was "more than merely representative of a great pioneer movement."<sup>11</sup> In addition, Walton's first public recognition was marked with an exhibition at the Kelvingrove Museum, Glasgow in 1993. Its aim was to bring Walton to the forefront, as Mackintosh's centenary exhibition had achieved in 1968. However, Walton has not enjoyed the same

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<sup>9</sup> Pevsner, Nikolaus. *George Walton His Life and Work*. *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*. 3 April 1939, page 543

<sup>10</sup> John Betjeman was editor of the *Architectural Review* from 1930-1935

<sup>11</sup> Hall, Michael. *Eloquence of Line*. *Country Life*. Volume 187, Number 33. August 1993, page 54



revival and journalists at the opening exhibition briefly justified his achievements in the manner of "what Walton has in common with Mackintosh."<sup>12</sup> In addition, research undertaken for this paper only revealed one book dedicated to Walton's work. It is a detailed account of his projects but has limited analysis of his work.

In this manner, the conclusion of this paper must be holistic and consider the significance of the contribution of Walton and Mackintosh during the movement's entire period including the response of their contemporaries and the designers' influence on the surviving legacy of the Glasgow Style. In this way, Walton's work may deserve greater recognition for its contribution to the Glasgow Style.

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<sup>12</sup> Carr, Richard. Another unsung Scottish Hero. *Building Design*. Number 1138/1139. August 20 1993. Page 2



## Section 1: Early Contribution to the Glasgow Style

A key criteria in assessing the significance of Walton and Mackintosh in relation to the Glasgow Style is how they shaped the movement in its formative years and therefore contributed to its overall development. Examination of Walton's early work for Rowntree's tearooms clearly shows <sup>DATE</sup> adherence to the emerging Glasgow Style, most notably in his innovative furniture designs. During a similar period, Mackintosh was artistically restricted by his apprenticeship and produced work which merely emulated the traditional style. However, although this simple comparison of their early work draws a strong conclusion in favour of Walton, it is naive to suggest Mackintosh was purely a slave to accepted practice during this period. Beyond the constraints of his formal apprenticeship, he was developing a philosophy and perfecting an approach which would later become synonymous with the Glasgow Style.

Evidence for Walton's early contribution to the emerging Glasgow Style can be found in his commission to "create appropriate interiors"<sup>13</sup> for Rowntree's tearooms in 1895. Working for employers who had a strong reputation for quality products and who readily adopted progressive technical developments provided an ideal environment for Walton to trial his innovative furnishings and metalwork. He sought for unity of design in these early commissions, fulfilling Karen Moon's principle that a successful project in the Glasgow Style was a result of the

<sup>13</sup> Moon, Karen. George Walton & Co: Work for Commercial Organisations The Rowntree Firms. Decorative Arts Society Journal. Volume 141, Number 5. 1980, page 12



"imagination of a single designer creating every aspect of the interior himself."<sup>14</sup>

This overarching ambition to achieve holistic schemes is evident in Walton's work as early as 1892, with the commission at Drumalis. The concept was important and designers believed "the design and decoration of a pepper pot is as important, in its degree, as the conception of a cathedral."<sup>15</sup> At Drumalis, Walton combines the smallest elements such as the individual door handle motifs under a theme that unifies the whole design.



Plate 1: Walton country style chair, Rowntree, 1895

FIGURE

PLATES ARE USUALLY FULL PAGE (COLOUR IMAGES)



Plate 2: Black-enamelled chair, Rowntree Café, 1895

Walton was able to experiment with a wide variety of styles at Rowntree's tearooms. Three strands of development are apparent: the country style, plank construction and interpretations of the eighteenth century Sheraton and Regency styles. The country style (Plate 1) had been previously designed for his brother Edward's home and Annan's photography gallery in 1891 and 1892 respectively. In contrast to this rustic style, an elegant tall-backed chair finished in black enamel (Plate 2) was revealed. The design originated from the Sheraton and Regency

FIG

REF?

<sup>14</sup> Moon, Karen. George Walton: Designer and Architect. White Cockade Publishing. Oxford, 1993, page 110

<sup>15</sup> Cumming, Elizabeth. Hand, Heart and Soul The Arts and Crafts Movement in Scotland. Birlinn Limited. Edinburgh, 2006, page 39





Plate 3: traditional French style *Caquetoire* chair

style through its finish, structure of the arms and outward curve of the legs. However, the elongated proportion is a modern technique that links it to the Aesthetic Movement. Each of Walton's experiments with construction methods, materials or sculptural form bears relevance to the emerging Glasgow Style. Personal interpretation is clear even though the designs remain traditional.



Plate 4: Abingwood chair, Rowntree Café, 1895

The Abingwood style is the most unconventional and deserves fuller attention. It was inspired by *caquetoire* construction: a French Renaissance style that became popular in Britain in the sixteenth century. Plate 3 shows a traditional design with the plank back extending below seat level, semi-circular arms and trapezoid seat. Plate 4 shows

Walton's interpretation, known as The Abingwood, with an angled, tapered back and cantilevered, flatter arms. The design's elongated proportions clearly link it to the new aesthetic movement. Walton's early application of the principles

Ca 1870 So NOT NEW  
START



embodying the Glasgow Style highlights his significant contribution to the movement during its formative years.



Plate 5: Redclyffe, Springburn, Mackintosh, 1890

In contrast to Walton's early experimentation within the Glasgow Style, Mackintosh's formal apprenticeship gave him little opportunity to break from practice. Much of his early architectural work was in a traditional style; a Greek

DESIGNS

TRADITIONAL  
TRAINING

public hall, a French Renaissance museum and a classical chapter house.<sup>16</sup> Despite the constraints of his apprenticeship, there are glimmers of a distinctive style emerging in Mackintosh's work. A pair of semi-detached houses from 1890 have references to the Scottish vernacular that clearly distinguishes them from their neighbours (Plate 5). Mackintosh also supervised the "unorthodox and very striking"<sup>17</sup> internal colour scheme. Yet, beyond these peculiar features, the design does not convey the ambition of the Glasgow Style as articulately as his later work.

However, although Mackintosh's physical work was still restricted by formal practice, he was gradually expounding a philosophy which encouraged a break from traditional convention. A pivotal movement was his competition entry for a railway terminus<sup>18</sup> (Plate 6), which needed to address the problem of a large arched station roof in relation to the surrounding low-level buildings. His solution was to disguise

<sup>16</sup> 'A Public Hall' awarded Alexander Thomson Travelling Scholarship in 1890, Science and Art Museum design awarded the National Silver Medal in 1891, 'Chapter House' submitted for the Soane Medallion Competition in 1891-2.

<sup>17</sup> Howarth, Thomas. Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement. Second edition. Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd. London 1977, page 22

<sup>18</sup> The Soane Medallion Competition, RIBA 1892-3



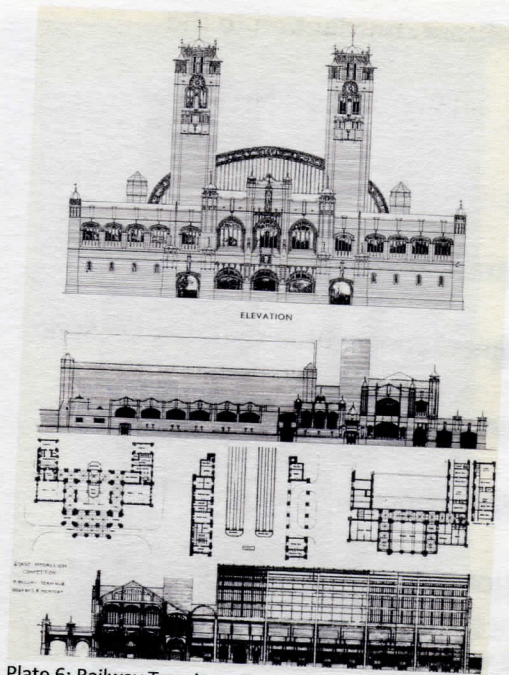


Plate 6: Railway Terminus, Soane Medallion Competition, Mackintosh, 1892

the discrepancy with a pair of high towers, which the judges subsequently criticised: "if the design does not look like what it is intended for, you may depend on it that it is wrongly conceived."<sup>19</sup> Mackintosh's response was published in his paper 'Architecture' in 1893 in which he seized the opportunity to express his opinion: "all great and living architecture has been the direct expression, of the needs and beliefs

of man at the time of its creation."<sup>20</sup> He was revolting against the fashion for "imitation in architecture, and ugly meritless mass productions,"<sup>21</sup> emphasising that architecture should not be an empty shell. His strong language intended to challenge the work of practicing architects. His paper is hugely significant as it is the first time Mackintosh is seen breaking conventions.

Although this innovative thinking did not develop in his architecture for some time, Mackintosh was able to express himself more freely in his sketches. The earliest recording of this two-dimensional work is a photograph of Mackintosh's bedroom circa 1890 showing a frieze of conventionalised cats (Plate 7). Howarth rightly

<sup>19</sup> Howarth, Thomas. *Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement*. Second edition. Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd. London 1977, page 16. Comment made by the Honorary Secretary of the RIBA, Mr William Emerson. It is interesting that the criticism states 'function and fitness for purpose', which became iconic of the modern movement in the 1920s. The comments made a clear impression; Mackintosh's elevations at the Willow Tearooms are a further key work in advance of the post-war period style.

<sup>20</sup> Robertson, Pamela. *Charles Rennie Mackintosh: The Architectural Papers*. White Cockade in association with The Hunterian Art Gallery. Glasgow, 1990, page 207: original from Mackintosh's paper *Architecture* in 1893, page 19

<sup>21</sup> Plunkett, Drew. *Four Studies of Charles Rennie Mackintosh*. New York School of Interior Design. New York, 1996, page 13. First English edition in January 1974. Printed in Italy by Artigrafiche Meroni, Lissone, translation by Bruno and Christina Del Priore





Plate 7: Mackintosh bedroom, Dennistoun, c. 1890

makes important claims to these works as confirmation that Mackintosh was "experimenting with original forms by 1890."<sup>22</sup> This suggests his style was developed, rather than experimental, by 1895, when Walton was revealing his Abingwood chair.

Therefore, this comparison of the early work completed by the two designers implies that although Mackintosh and Walton were making significant contributions to the style by 1895, Walton was the first to express his ideas three-dimensionally and bring the movement to the public.

GLASGOW STYLE?

BE CAREFUL CALLING IT A 'MOVEMENT'!

↳ DID YOU SHOW WALTON  
DID THIS PRIOR TO 1890?  
DRUMMAIS IS 1892

<sup>22</sup> Howarth, Thomas. Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement. Second edition. Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd. London 1977, page 21



## Section 2: Promotion of the Glasgow Style

SOME, OR  
POSSIBLY  
MANY

WILL  
YOU  
PROVE  
THIS?  
How?

Architectural historians hail Mackintosh as the unrivalled innovator of the Glasgow Style. At the beginning of his career, he flourished with the support of colleagues from the Glasgow School of Art but the majority of British critics did not see the value of Mackintosh's work. Many believed his work was vulgar and aggressive in its reaction against conventions. In this manner, Walton's work achieved greater 'success' at the time because the subtleness of his designs were more accessible and widely accepted by his contemporaries. His work was trusted because he did not distort conventional proportions or question traditional concepts of beauty. Nevertheless, while Walton's career enjoyed steady commissions, Mackintosh's short fame was more distinctive because his designs were iconic, even when reviewed negatively. With the benefit of hindsight, architectural historians regard Mackintosh's radical designs as greatly significant to the lasting impression of the Glasgow Style.

FIRST USE? EXPLAIN SLANG

Mackintosh's confidence as a young designer ensured ample publicity for his graphic work associated with the Spook School. *The Studio* gathered attention for the emerging style, recognising that "the purpose of a poster is to attract noise."<sup>23</sup> The magazine's editor, Gleeson White wrote in defence of the movement in 1897 persuading, "it is yet too early in the spring of the new Renaissance to decide which

<sup>23</sup> White, Gleeson. Some Glasgow Designers and Their Work (part 1). *The Studio*. Volume 11, 1897, page 98



will ultimately ripen to maturity."<sup>24</sup> White is opposing critiques who labelled the style as 'eccentric,' arguing that it was to be expected as the first response to work that would later be accepted as proof of serious progress. He believes defence of Mackintosh is "easy to one who believes in it."<sup>25</sup>

At the time of the tearoom commissions, Mackintosh was in the fortunate position to produce work purely in the developing 'spook school' style and his work inspired a new term in Glasgow vocabulary: "quite Kate Cranstonish."<sup>26</sup> However, the 'Spook School' did not gain acceptance with the English critic and some journals were compelled to personal attack. In 1903 *The Cabinet Maker* resigned its neutral reviews in criticism of Mackintosh's high-backed chair: "the more stones that are flung at this class of work the better."<sup>27</sup>

Unfortunately, it is likely that only a few of Mackintosh's clients appreciated the inner meaning of his work. This is particularly evident at the Willow Tearoom which customers frequented only when there were "afternoons to be dawdled away."<sup>28</sup> Only the founders of *The Four* knew the symbolism in their work and this secrecy is likely to have prevailed in their approach to interior design. Prospective clients probably saw the designs as a novel experience and it is apparent that Mackintosh wholly depended on Miss Cranston to provide opportunities to trial the 'new style'.

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<sup>24</sup> White, Gleeson. *Some Glasgow Designers and Their Work* (part 1). *The Studio*. Volume 11, 1897, page 88

<sup>25</sup> White, Gleeson. *Some Glasgow Designers and Their Work* (part 1). *The Studio*. Volume 11, 1897, page 98

<sup>26</sup> Muir, James Hamilton. *Glasgow in 1901*. Illustrated by Muirhead Bone, with a new introduction by Perilla Kinchin. White Cockade Publishing. Oxford, 2001, page 167

<sup>27</sup> Moon, Karen. *George Walton: Designer and Architect*. White Cockade Publishing. Oxford, 1993, page 124

<sup>28</sup> Blair, Anna. *Tea at Miss Cranston's: A Century of Glasgow Memories*. Shepherd-Walwyn Ltd. London, 1985, page 60



Nevertheless Mackintosh gained <sup>SOME</sup> acceptance in mainland Europe. From Germany, *Dekorative Kunst* was the only journal to provide a complete analysis of the tearoom in 1905. A French critic, E.B. Kalas, also famously praised the "virginal beauty"<sup>29</sup> of the Mackintosh's home in 1905. He described the designers as "two visionary souls in ecstatic communion"<sup>30</sup> and undoubtedly, their "exquisite taste and masterly handling of space, light, and colour"<sup>31</sup> enchanted him. Unfortunately, Kalas wrote the article for a French audience.

As a result, Mackintosh did not enjoy the comfort of steady commissions in Glasgow or Britain. The tearoom interiors for Miss Cranston mainly consolidated his fame. In 1901, Mackintosh did not exhibit at the Glasgow International Exhibition; his commission was simply to design stands for the Women's Section, later described as "a sort of cage."<sup>32</sup> Despite the "11½ million"<sup>33</sup> visitors to the exhibition, he seemed to place greater value on his success abroad and exhibited his furniture and domestic interiors in Vienna in 1900 and Turin in 1902.

In contrast, Walton was 'successful' in the sense that he sustained a steady flow of work until the end of his career. <sup>REF</sup> He gained acceptance because his style appealed to a mainstream audience. His work was widely published in *The British Home of Today* by Walter Shaw Sparrow and he retained loyal clients who respected his

I KEEP WONDERING HOW YOU KNOW THIS. JOB BOOKS? NEEDS SOME REFERENCE.

<sup>29</sup> Crawford, Alan. Charles Rennie Mackintosh. Thames and Hudson Ltd. London, 1995, page 72

<sup>30</sup> Crawford, Alan. Charles Rennie Mackintosh. Thames and Hudson Ltd. London, 1995, page 72

<sup>31</sup> Nuttgens, Patrick. Mackintosh & His Contemporaries in Europe and America. Cameron Books. London, 1988, page 46

<sup>32</sup> Cumming, Elizabeth. Hand, Heart and Soul The Arts and Crafts Movement in Scotland. Birlinn Limited. Edinburgh, 2006, page 68

<sup>33</sup> Berry, Simon and Whyte, Hamish. Glasgow Observed. John Donald Publishers Ltd. Edinburgh, 1987, page 117



sense of tradition. Walton did not reproduce his designs on a mass scale and relied solely on clients' recommendations to gain work.

However, Walton was not commercially minded and throughout his career, he remained loyal to "the world of artists."<sup>34</sup> Despite the invigorating atmosphere in Glasgow following the International Exhibitions in 1888 and 1901, Walton did not seek greater publicity and the demand for his work quickly lost momentum. In addition, when Walton turned to architecture, his minimal fame did not warrant wide press coverage and the profession ignored completion of The White House.

As a result, there remains a strong argument that Mackintosh was the more influential designer. Although British Heritage awarded The White House, Grade II listed status in 1994,<sup>35</sup> the building does not benefit from the same publicity as Mackintosh's School of Art in Glasgow. It is evident that the influence of Francis Newbery and *The Four* developed Mackintosh's ideals beyond that of the Glasgow Style. Architectural historians enjoy his distortions of conventional forms and proportions despite the focus on aesthetics rather than on structure.

Mackintosh's high-backed chair (Plate 8) acquired fame because it was radical. His work is regarded as a bold intervention which his "predecessors had only theorized about."<sup>36</sup> Unlike Walton, Mackintosh had no qualms about the 'authenticity' of his

<sup>34</sup> Moon, Karen. *George Walton: Designer and Architect*. White Cockade Publishing. Oxford, 1993, page 96

<sup>35</sup> British Heritage, The White House, Harpsden, site visited 25 March 2011, <<http://www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/en-361494-the-white-house-harpsden>>

<sup>36</sup> Alison, Filippo. *Charles Rennie Mackintosh as a Designer of Chairs*. First English edition. Translation by Bruno and Christina Del Priore. Artigrafiche Meroni, Lissone. Warehouse Publications. Italy, 1974, page 14





Plate 8: Mackintosh Chair, Argyle Street, 1897

work as he strove for originality. Herbert MacNair<sup>37</sup> describes how Mackintosh experimented by tracing new designs over contemporary furniture: "backs would be extended, arms splayed, rails deepened and modelled."<sup>38</sup> ✓

However, Mackintosh's eccentricity is a negative quality if 'restraint' is an important aspect of good design. Successful designers can moderate their creativity to good effect. This is evident at Buchanan Street tearooms where the architect added unnecessary ornaments such as "stone coats-of-arms balanced on the banisters."<sup>39</sup> The transition from tradition to modernity was less noticeable in Walton's designs but became a "superfluous 'eyesore'"<sup>40</sup> against Mackintosh's scheme. Although Walton's restraint meant his design was not great promotion for the Glasgow Style, he could control its introduction to the project for maximum effect. It appears Mackintosh is too hasty in his eagerness for "whimsy and decorative extravagance,"<sup>41</sup> and Walton did not maximise his talent.

It is clear that the Glasgow Style developed in two ways; it was either gradual simplification of traditional styles or a violent break from conventions. The style of Mackintosh's work unquestionably belongs to the latter. Walton's work does not

<sup>37</sup> MacNair was a member of *The Four* and worked with Mackintosh during his apprenticeship at Honeyman and Keppie  
<sup>38</sup> Nuttgens, Patrick. *Mackintosh & His Contemporaries in Europe and America*. Cameron Books. London, 1988, page 48  
<sup>39</sup> Kinchin, Perilla. *Tea and Taste: The Glasgow Tea Rooms 1875-1975*. White Cockade Publishing. Oxford, 1991, page 88  
<sup>40</sup> Kinchin, Perilla. *Tea and Taste: The Glasgow Tea Rooms 1875-1975*. White Cockade Publishing. Oxford, 1991, page 88  
<sup>41</sup> Macleod, Robert. *Charles Rennie Mackintosh Architect and Artist*. William Collins Sons and Company Limited. London, 1983, page 66



fit into a convenient classification as his early Glasgow Style designs matured to bear strong resemblance to the English Arts and Crafts.

SO THEN IS HE  
GLASGOW STYLE? ✓

The School of Art was undoubtedly influential as it taught the positive and negative powers of tradition. This likely split the interests of Mackintosh and Walton. For designers such as Mackintosh, freedom from the past provided an opportunity to celebrate "line, form, space, techniques and materials entirely for their own sake."<sup>42</sup> Walton was able to use texture and pattern to enrich interior space whereas Mackintosh's modern designs defined geometry without reliance on the ambiguity of colour and lighting.

Therefore, Mackintosh's extravagance has easily deprived Walton of recognition.

This became indisputably clear at Miss Cranston's Buchanan Street tearooms when Gleeson White's article for *The Studio* failed to credit Walton's contribution.

Although at the time, Walton's style was becoming popular in England, for readers it would seem that Mackintosh's "extremely intelligent handiwork"<sup>43</sup> deserved sole credit for the entire project. White writes that Walton's work was "entirely devoid of the qualities"<sup>44</sup> which made Mackintosh prominent. It seems apparent that the movement owed more to the stronger, abstract forms of Mackintosh's work.

Timothy Neat believes the originality of Mackintosh's work is clear when compared to the "beautiful, yet essentially meaningless"<sup>45</sup> designs by Walton.

<sup>42</sup> Cumming, Elizabeth. *Hand, Heart and Soul The Arts and Crafts Movement in Scotland*. Birlinn Limited. Edinburgh, 2006, page 30

<sup>43</sup> White, Gleeson. *Some Glasgow Designers and Their Work (part 1)*. *The Studio*. Volume 11, 1897, page 94

<sup>44</sup> White, Gleeson. *Some Glasgow Designers and Their Work (part 1)*. *The Studio*. Volume 11, 1897, page 87

<sup>45</sup> Neat, Timothy. *Part Seen, Part Imagined: Meaning and Symbolism in the Work of Charles Renee Mackintosh and Margaret Macdonald*. Canongate Press Ltd. London, 1994, page 117



### Section 3: Factors Hindering Walton

Walton appeared to have allowed his contemporaries to overlook his designs because a lack of architectural training overwhelmed his confidence. In one respect, this is justified because his early commissions are clear evidence that he could not determine brief requirements; his domestic interiors are uncontrolled yet the commercial commissions for John Rowntree and Miss Cranston apply the same techniques. Yet, seemingly unintentionally, Walton struck upon an innovative approach to design that became popular across Britain. Nonetheless, he could not compete with the architectural talent of Mackintosh. Although external forces governing the role of the architect appeared to work in Walton's favour, Mackintosh had extensive training and could adapt his creativity to many situations.

Re?

Do we know this?

It is likely that Walton regarded himself as an inferior designer because at the start of his career there is evidence that he was unable to determine the requirements of his clients. His first projects at Thornton Lodge and East Park demonstrate an uncontrolled enthusiasm and he must have felt frustrated because the schemes did not achieve the restfulness he later employed as his main concept. It is clear that he had yet to learn how the "effect of ornament greatly depends on the value of bare spaces surrounding it."<sup>46</sup>

How?

<sup>46</sup> Moon, Karen. George Walton: Designer and Architect. White Cockade Publishing. Oxford, 1993, page 29



Walton's lack of experience had an adverse effect on his work because it led him to design the same style of interior for domestic and commercial work. Although "connections between the domestic and the commercial"<sup>47</sup> were apparent in the Arts and Crafts movement, a student of design would learn to adopt different approaches depending on the client's requirements. It is possible to conclude that Walton was "simply insensitive"<sup>48</sup> to the different functions of design decisions and simply applied his style indiscriminately to all commissions. However, his choice was hugely successful and helped confirm the feminine, domestic style of the artistic tearoom. In this respect, the success of the tearooms owes credit to the Temperance Movement and the increasing popularity of non-alcoholic establishments. The intimate, homely atmosphere achieved by Walton contrasted strongly with the "glitter of contemporary public houses"<sup>49</sup> and provided a level of comfort encouraged by domestic surroundings.

Walton first employed this domestic technique at John Rowntree's tearoom where the men's dining room had a rough chunkiness while the atmosphere in the women's department store was delicate and refined. The Victorian era influenced this distinction between the sexes but Walton rarely found his client's expectations to be a constraint. Walton could provide modern interiors that were imaginative yet appropriate; an airy wallpaper was used in the men's rooms which introduced a 'prettiness' not found in the furniture. This contrasted strongly with Victorian

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<sup>47</sup> Elliot, Bridget and Helland, Janice. *Women Artists and the Decorative Arts 1880-1935, The Gender of Ornament*. Ashgate Publishing Limited. England, 2002, page 9

<sup>48</sup> Moon, Karen. *George Walton & Co: Work for Commercial Organisations The Rowntree Firms*. *Decorative Arts Society Journal*. Volume 141, Number 5. 1980, page 19

<sup>49</sup> Moon, Karen. *George Walton & Co: Work for Commercial Organisations The Rowntree Firms*. *Decorative Arts Society Journal*. Volume 141, Number 5. 1980, page 19



practice which declared sober colours and materials for male areas, keeping lightness for female rooms.

Walton's approach at the tearooms achieved an equal response at the Kodak showrooms for George Davison. Walton discovered there was no need to alter his domestic style when the approach could bring benefit to the business. Miss Cranston's commission may have influenced Walton's ambitions to provide customer care as the tearooms sought to provide "an escape from commercial values into tasteful domesticity."<sup>50</sup> The quiet comfort achieved in the showrooms was appealing yet unpressured, almost disarming customers in the seamless transition from home to retail. Davison recognised the value of Walton's work: other photographic firms did not overlook the scheme's success and followed their example. *EXAMPLES?*

Despite Walton's apparent 'accidental' success by interpreting the brief incorrectly, there is evidence to suggest Mackintosh evolved his interiors in the same manner by developing a style in a domestic setting and applying it to public exhibitions and tearooms. This happened in three stages. The flat at Mains Street in 1900 saw a sparse white interior with controlled areas of colour. This was applied to the Vienna exhibition and ladies' lunch room at Ingram Street Tearooms. Between 1901 and 1903, the drawings for 'House for an Art Lover' competition explored a curved, ornate and colourful scheme. The Willow Tearoom revealed this concept in a physical form. It remains under speculation as to whether Mackintosh developed

<sup>50</sup> Kinchin, Perilla. Miss Cranston: Patron of Charles Rennie Mackintosh. NMS Publishing Limited. Edinburgh, 1999, page 28



the Mains Street interior style because he foresaw its success and wanted to make it accessible within the public realm, or whether, like Walton, he stumbled upon the creative invention as more commissions became available.



Plate 9: Front elevation of The Leys, 1901



Plate 10: Rear elevation of The Leys, 1901

Walton's lack of experience is also evident in the composition of his elevations of The Leys, Elstree. It was one of his first architectural commissions, built in 1901 for J.J.B. Wellington and similarly to his first interior schemes, Walton could not suppress his numerous ideas. The front elevation of The Leys (Plate 9) takes an extreme stance on symmetry, which was unexpectedly regular for an Arts and Crafts building, and unique to Walton. The extent of Walton's control reveals a weakness in his design and is a clear indicator of his lack of experience: one upstairs room required a 'blind' window revealing how the intentions for the plan and elevation could not be resolved. In addition, the side elevations completely fail to link the horizontally arranged front elevation, with the vertical rear elevation (Plate 10). The difference in Walton's concept was so great that it would take an exceptional architect to resolve the design.





Plate 11: Front elevation of The Willow, 1903-4

However, it can be argued that Mackintosh's elevation at the Willow tearoom (Plate 11) also lacks refinement. The canopy cuts the composition in half, emphasising the different treatment of the upper and lower sections. A desire to emphasise the first floor is justifiable but ultimately the two facades have little relationship with each other. It is not clear why the windows are asymmetrical

when internally they serve the same purpose. Howarth suggests that the introduction of a large window expresses the main staircase within the building.<sup>51</sup> This could also explain the curved wall at this point, perhaps symbolising the staircase bay.

Nevertheless, the lower half of the elevation can claim to be one of Mackintosh's most elegant designs. The use of horizontal openings and plain surfaces relates his design with the most advanced architects on the continent practicing post war. Mackintosh wanted the street to interact with a deeply penetrated, smooth surface, "modelled like sculptor's clay."<sup>52</sup> It was a clear concept achieved through mechanical precision and sharply defined windows. It is credit to its originality that

<sup>51</sup> Howarth, Thomas. Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement. Second edition. Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd. London 1977, page 138

<sup>52</sup> Howarth, Thomas. Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement. Second edition. Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd. London 1977, page 138



only the lower half of the facade was published in Britain in *The Builders' Journal and Architectural Engineer*.<sup>53</sup>

Despite the publicity awarded to Mackintosh's work, there were external forces acting in Walton's favour in becoming a significant designer. His lack of training and 'artist background' were becoming sought after qualities. The increasingly technical and commercial attitude of the RIBA in the 1890s and early 1900s was forcing architects to reject the 'tradesman' approach in their work. Many Arts and Crafts architects were revolting and referring to themselves as artists not professionals. Even the architects Walton admired such as William Morris and Whistler had started their careers as artists and as they turned to professional practice continued to describe themselves as artists. Walton's lack of formal training had noticeable benefits in his work; he was independent of conventional thinking and had an unprejudiced approach to materials and construction.

THEY WERE NOT ARCHITECTS

This shifting attitude did not go unnoticed in Glasgow and Margaret Macdonald knew that if Mackintosh were to "succeed as a great architect, he must first become a great artist."<sup>54</sup> The School of Art provided Mackintosh with encouragement and direction that was unavailable at the offices of Honeyman and Keppie. Despite Walton's enthusiasm and willingness to accept new commissions, he did not have the support or training to rival Mackintosh. Mackintosh had the ability to apply his talent to suit his purpose, and upon meeting Miss Cranston, he

<sup>53</sup> *The Builders Journal and Architectural Engineer*, 28 November 1906, volume 23, number 589, page 263

<sup>54</sup> Birkhauser, Jude. *Glasgow Girls: Women in Art and Design 1880-1920*. Canongate Publishing Limited. Edinburgh, 1990, page 121





Plate 12: Portrait of Mackintosh, Annan, c.1900

was not as an architect in an office, but a  
an artist in his spare time. This is  
supported by the famous portrait by  
Annan showing Mackintosh in artists' dress  
with the characteristic floppy bowtie (Plate  
12). Artistic creativity was an important  
aspect in Miss Cranston's commissions and  
she actively promoted his experiments in  
her decorative work.



#### Section 4: Collaboration between Mackintosh and Walton

The ability to work in collaboration is an important characteristic of a successful architect. To work in collaboration means agreement at all design stages, from conception to completion, making it difficult to distinguish each artist individually on the evidence of the finished work alone. *The Artist* interviewed Glaswegian art workers in 1897 who confirmed, "all work done is really the work of both"<sup>55</sup> and equal in value. The tearoom commission by Kate Cranston at Buchanan Street is the only example of Walton and Mackintosh working together and therefore provides an interesting case study by which to compare their architectural qualities. Unfortunately, the partnership was disjointed and the tearoom did not provide Walton or Mackintosh with their greatest work. It is important to examine the cause of this failed collaboration and it seems likely that Walton found it very difficult to express himself within the combined atmosphere of Mackintosh's ambition and Miss Cranston's competitiveness.

The surviving photographs of the tearooms show there was no unity of ambition between Mackintosh and Walton. The nature of the collaboration forced Mackintosh into competitive individualism; his work "verged on abstraction"<sup>56</sup> and he ensured the focus was on his eye-catching wall murals in the Ladies' Tearoom and the Luncheon Room (Plate 13). His exotic details could co-ordinate with Walton's furniture to some extent: the elongated trees matched the straight, high-

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<sup>55</sup> Helland, Janice. *The Studios of Frances and Margaret Macdonald*. Manchester University Press. England, 1996, page 7

<sup>56</sup> Willson, Clare A.P. *Mural Painting in Britain 1840-1940: Image and Meaning*. Oxford University Press. England, 2000, page 362



backs of Walton's Abingwood chair and the curves of the vegetation correspond



Plate 13: Mackintosh murals, Buchanan Street, 1897

with Walton's arched ladderbacks.

However, his strive for originality prevailed

as he recognised his role was "to

communicate and to entertain."<sup>57</sup> As such

the scheme was strikingly conceived and

Walton's natural floral compositions

looked naive in comparison to

Mackintosh's 'spook school' graphic

murals.

The incoherent outcome of this disjointed partnership is especially vivid given Walton's later success in collaborations, particularly in England where some of his most notable work arose from his ability to work with other designers. Indeed, it could be that a previously successful collaboration with Fred Rowntree may have informed his management of the tearooms, with Walton allowing himself to be overshadowed for the greater good of the project. In contrast to his work with Rowntree, where each individual had clearly defined job roles, the commission for Miss Cranston gave roles which were too similar for one designer to take overall control. Walton knew the importance of peer support and that compatibility with Mackintosh was essential for a satisfactory outcome. Mackintosh in his training as an architect would want considerable influence on the overall effect of the room

<sup>57</sup> Plunkett, Drew. *Four Studies of Charles Rennie Mackintosh*. New York School of Interior Design. New York, 1996, page 8



whereas Walton, as an interior designer, knew his role was to work within the limits.



Plate 14: Portrait Kate Cranston, Annan, 1900

It is extremely likely that Miss Cranston's tearoom commission was not an ideal working environment for collaboration between Walton and Mackintosh.

Although in many ways she was an ideal patron, providing an exclusive opportunity for the young designers to work within the public realm and permitting their spatial and graphical experiments to develop

without hindrance, she also encouraged an *source?*

atmosphere of competition between the two designers which created an uncomfortable working relationship between them. Miss Cranston herself was a natural showman with extravagant taste (Plate 14) and she personally thrived under competition. Fuelled by sibling rivalries in her childhood and later commercial competition with her brother Stuart in the tearooms business, she was driven by ambition to bring originality to her business. While the approach had brought Miss Cranston much success and made her one of the best-known figures in Glasgow, this success was not replicated in her commission for Walton and Mackintosh.



Nevertheless, it should also be noted that Walton may not have been the ideal working partner. Although his temperament meant he was probably easier to work with than Mackintosh, Walton's earliest experience of collaborative working was with family members and as such may not have been ideal preparation for the future. The first fully recorded commission is the decoration of St Peter's Episcopal Church completed with his sisters in the mid 1890s. Constance had the leading role to paint the main walls. Walton himself was responsible for the decoration of the chancel roof and altar tapestries, likely to have been completed by Helen and Hannah. The siblings certainly had an affectionate relationship and learnt to work together successfully. Their ideas and ambitions were clearly united.

Sources

As a result, Walton's early collaborations did not prepare Walton for working with strong willed personalities such as Mackintosh. His sisters were perhaps too closely involved in Walton's early career and their respect for him meant Walton became accustomed to control as lead designer. In later commissions, when his collaborative partners fought competitively for greater recognition, Walton willingly took the lesser role without defending his experience or design ability. In this way, Walton also developed a bias towards projects where designer was also artist. These projects appealed to his ambition for unity of design and meant he could control production and schedules of work. Walton remained unable to regard commissions as a commercial arrangement throughout his career. Nevertheless, the disjointed outcome of Miss Cranston's tearoom commission still highlights the inability of Mackintosh to work in collaboration, an important attribute for any successful architect.

Do you know his sisters were not? How?

How?



## Section 5: Influence of Walton on Mackintosh

It is fundamentally important to analyse to what extent Walton influenced Mackintosh's work. Walton was an experienced furniture designer and there is evidence that he provided the competitive motivation for some of Mackintosh's most inspirational classics, including the high-backed chair. Furthermore, there are aspects of Walton's own innovations which later emerge in Mackintosh's work.

However, it is also important to consider potential limitations to this strong influence. Given that both designers were inspired by the same artistic movements, it is difficult to identify which similarities in their work can be attributed to 'plagiarism', and which arose from the general artistic atmosphere of the time. Nonetheless, there is still clear evidence of competitive stimulation from Walton and imitation by Mackintosh. This provides support for Walton being attributed a greater role in the development of the Glasgow Style.

Walton's designs contained two important messages: the concept of unity and the quality of craftsmanship. Walton's sensitivity naturally sympathised with the Arts and Crafts belief of 'truth to materials' and despite the somewhat radical forms introduced in his new furniture designs, such as the Abingwood, construction was always rigorous. Walton's experience taught Mackintosh the importance of simplicity: "simplicity which is classic"<sup>58</sup> because it allowed the designer to master formwork and structure. Although Mackintosh is seen to employ the same

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<sup>58</sup> Moon, Karen. *George Walton: Designer and Architect*. White Cockade Publishing. Oxford, 199, page 107



technique in his designs, his craftsmanship does not show the same respect and none of his furniture at Argyle Street tearoom has the "grace and lightness"<sup>59</sup> of Walton's chairs at Buchanan Street. Mackintosh derived a tendency for abstraction through "curved and protracted lines."<sup>60</sup> It is clear that while Walton was the initial source of inspiration, Mackintosh enhanced his methods to emphasise the lines, which can "impress you as symbolic"<sup>61</sup> and seem part of a "strange system of magic."<sup>62</sup>



Plate 15: Lunch room, Buchanan Street, 1897



Plate 16: Luncheon Room, Buchanan Street, 1897

Working with Walton, an experienced furniture designer and innovator within the Glasgow Style, appears to have provoked Mackintosh to competitive individualism. Walton had considerable experience at integrating furniture elements into room schemes (Plate 15) and the chair in Plate 16 shows an unusually extended back which flows like the wall pattern in an elegant linear design. Where vertical emphasis is required this chair excels and it is likely Mackintosh saw the great potential

in Walton's design to "reinforce his own spatial composition."<sup>63</sup> Although the

<sup>59</sup> Howarth, Thomas. Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement. Second edition. Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd. London 1977, page 130

<sup>60</sup> teNeues. Charles Rennie Mackintosh. photographs by Eric Thorburn. 2002 LOFT Publications. Spain, 2002, page 6

<sup>61</sup> The Arts and Crafts. The Studio. Volume 9, 1896, page 202

<sup>62</sup> The Arts and Crafts. The Studio. Volume 9, 1896, page 202

<sup>63</sup> Billcliffe, Roger. Charles Rennie Mackintosh: The Complete Furniture, Furniture Drawings and Interior Designs. Lutterworth Press. Guildford, 1979, page 11



elongated figures of Mackintosh's mural designs at the Buchanan Street tearoom had already demonstrated his mastery of extended form, Walton's introduction of his own 'verticality' element to the Glasgow Style through the furniture clearly encouraged improvements of Mackintosh's work. Roger Billcliffe makes the observation that "it was a desire to dominate Walton's rather strong room divisions"<sup>64</sup> that led Mackintosh to design his revolutionary high-backed chair.

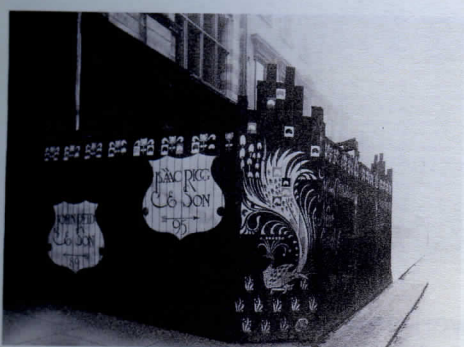


Plate 17: Walton's Buchanan Street hoarding, 1896

Besides this competitive motivation driving improvements in Mackintosh's work, there is also evidence of Mackintosh emulating Walton's successful innovations. The positive reception towards Walton's original hoarding design at the Buchanan

Street site in 1896, for example, clearly inspired Mackintosh when he had complete control of the later projects. Walton had seen the fencing as an opportunity to advertise Miss Cranston's new premises and Plate 17 shows the blackened timber with lettering and floral borders; stencilled on each chamfered corner was a brightly coloured peacock. Howarth writes that it was "probably the first occasion on which a utilitarian structure"<sup>65</sup> had been considered by an interior decorator and Karen Moon highlights how its novelty made the work intriguing and meant it "could not be passed by."<sup>66</sup> This approach to the hoarding was replicated by Mackintosh when he worked on the Willow Tearoom in 1903 (Plate 18). This

<sup>64</sup> Kinchin, Perilla. *Tea and Taste: The Glasgow Tea Rooms 1875-1975*. White Cockade Publishing. Oxford, 1991, page 94

<sup>65</sup> Howarth, Thomas. *Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement*. Second edition. Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd. London 1977, page 125

<sup>66</sup> Moon, Karen. *George Walton: Designer and Architect*. White Cockade Publishing. Oxford, 1993, page 56



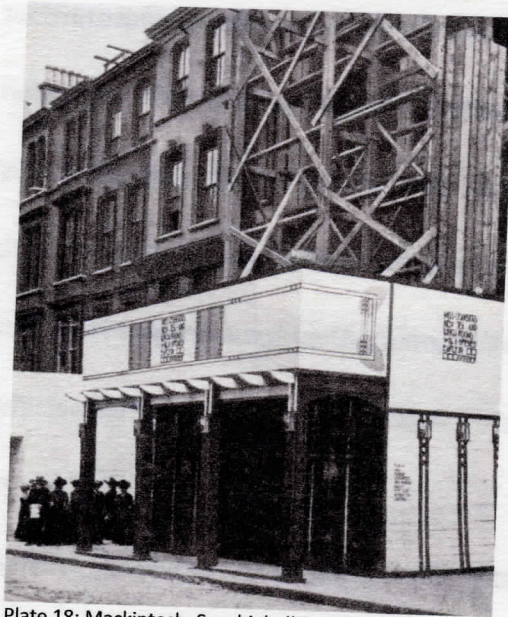


Plate 18: Mackintosh, Sauchiehall Street, 1903

supports Gleeson White's observation that Mackintosh's success was his ability to absorb new techniques from his contemporaries. Mackintosh was "learning on the job"<sup>67</sup> at Buchanan Street and intricately examining Walton's work. This provides strong evidence for Walton's influence on Mackintosh.

However, the importance of this potential imitation is tempered by the possibility that Walton did not actually conceive the pioneering hoarding concept. There is debate regarding Walton's ownership of the work and speculation that Mackintosh may have been the innovator. This is fuelled by the lack of similar precedents in Walton's contemporaneous portfolio and that the "sense of theatre"<sup>68</sup> surrounding the hoardings would seem to be a more accurate description of Mackintosh's work. He had already gained a reputation for causing a stir with his graphic experiments and it was more in his nature to create attention with radical ideas. In addition, these arguments ignore the fact that Mackintosh would have been unlikely to give Walton the credit for such a successful innovation. This is especially true given he had not shown caution in publication of his earlier controversial graphic work and mural designs. It seems likely that, as argued by Howarth, although the hoarding

<sup>67</sup> Moon, Karen. *George Walton: Designer and Architect*. White Cockade Publishing. Oxford, 1993, page 52

<sup>68</sup> Moon, Karen. *George Walton: Designer and Architect*. White Cockade Publishing. Oxford, 1993, page 56





Plate 19: Drawing Room, Thornton Lodge, 1891

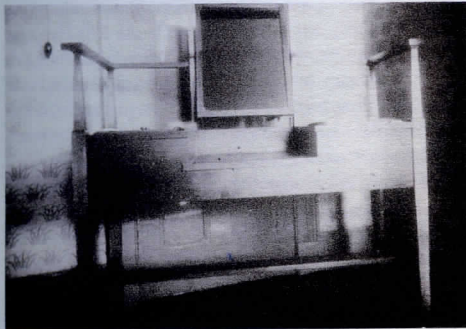


Plate 20: Walton's grass tuft design on wall, c.1891



Plate 21: Eyebright, small scale pattern, Morris, 1890



Plate 22: Lily and Rose, Walter Crane, c. 1894

was an "unusual field for the decorator,"<sup>69</sup> it can be justifiably concluded that Walton was the innovator.

Nonetheless, there were earlier signs that Walton could produce unconventional

designs. While the majority of his work in the 1880s shows evidence of

contemporary influences, unique features in his designs emerge. Plate 19 shows a

typical Walton design in the early 1890s

emulating the fashion for highly decorated

interiors. Although it was at this time that

he began to shift his interests in favour of

"restrained ornament set off against plain

surfaces"<sup>70</sup> and his grass-tuft pattern in

1891 became synonymous with this

concept (Plate 20). The motif originated

from floral fabrics by Morris & Co. (Plate 21)

but independently it becomes a novel

design. Hindsight suggests design

progression would naturally strive for

<sup>69</sup> Howarth, Thomas. *Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement*. Second edition. Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd. London 1977, page 125

<sup>70</sup> Moon, Karen. *George Walton: Designer and Architect*. White Cockade Publishing. Oxford, 1993, page 50



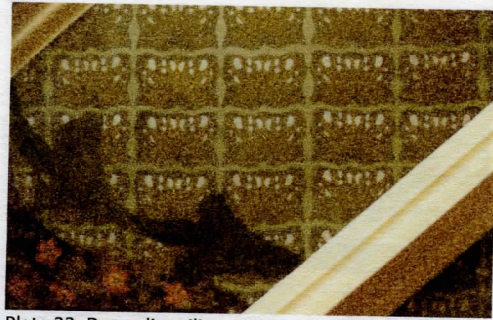


Plate 23: Drumalis ceiling, 1892 with grass pattern



Plate 24: stair window, c. 1892-3 with grass pattern



Plate 25: The Tree of Personal Effort, 1895

simplicity but it is likely that Crane's wallpapers in 1875 (Plate 22) and Walton's stencilling technique determined the sparse pattern. To be successful stencilling required an 'open' effect. Variations of this pattern appear frequently in Walton's work: the ceiling at Drumalis (Plate 23) and stained glass designs (Plate 24). Therefore his ability to extract modern designs from conventional sources means it is conceivable that Walton detected the unique opportunity to decorate the hoarding at the tearooms.

However, a more compelling limitation to the argument that Walton was a strong inspiration to Mackintosh is that both designers evidently shared similar influences and were enthused by the same artistic movements. This is clear, for example, in their application of colour. Walton's palette derived from traditional sources including the Glasgow Boys,



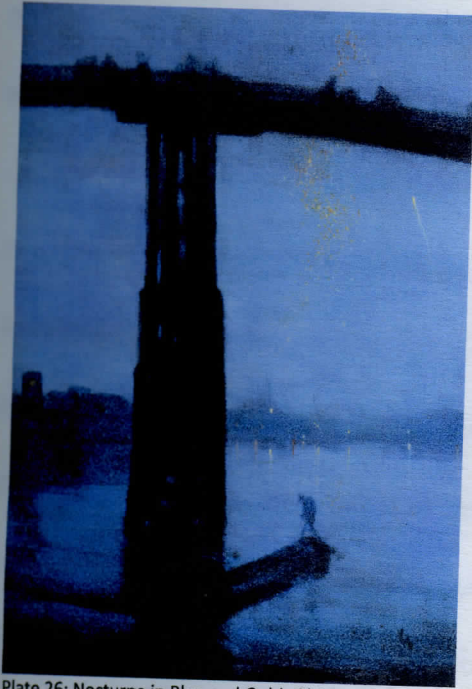


Plate 26: Nocturne in Blue and Gold, Old Battersea Bridge, Whistler, 1872-5

Whistler and the Aesthetic movement. Yet Mackintosh's work illustrates similar motivations. His early graphic work, 'The Tree of Personal Effort' (Plate 25), is closely related to Whistler's 'Nocturne in Blue and Gold: Old Battersea Bridge' (Plate 26). Mackintosh's 'grey-green-yellow' mural at Buchanan Street, representing the transition from earth to sky, is in close relation to the Aesthetic movement.

Evidently, both designers saw the charm of the movement. As a result, it is difficult to disentangle the direct impact of Walton's work on Mackintosh, given there was evidently much crossover and shared ancestry.

Despite these limitations, it is clear that Walton had an artistic influence on Mackintosh, especially during his formative years. Walton's introduction of a unique 'verticality' element to the Glasgow Style encouraged Mackintosh to hone the development of his high-backed chairs. The clear evidence for replication of Walton's successful innovations by Mackintosh provides strong support to Walton as a significant contributor to the development of the Glasgow Style.



## Section 6: Development of the Glasgow Style

This paper has illustrated how Walton produced innovative designs in the founding years of the Glasgow Style. However, his move to London early in his career ultimately altered the style of his work and even the first commissions are evident of change. G. and C. Larner believe Walton left for London in anticipation that any "young Glasgow architect was bound to be overshadowed by the genius of Charles Rennie Mackintosh."<sup>71</sup> Walton may have sought physical separation from Mackintosh, or his work was simply in response to different client expectations, but the fact remains that his most successful project only retained hints of the Glasgow Style. At the same time, Mackintosh was working devotedly under the new movement but his tearoom designs were not gaining the fame they deserved. Despite Walton's fading connections to the Glasgow Style, his success in London resulted in a greater promotion of the movement than Mackintosh could achieve in Glasgow.

The profound effect of Walton's move to London is evident in the restrained design of his interiors in his house at Holland Street and the plain walls at The Leys, both completed in 1901. Walton highly regarded Morris' philosophy that it was "essential ... to find inspiration, and adapt ideas, from the art and design of previous generations"<sup>72</sup> and as a result, Walton's projects indicate a maturing

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<sup>71</sup> Larner, Gerald and Celia. *The Glasgow Style*. Paul Harris Publishing. Edinburgh, 1979, page 5

<sup>72</sup> Hall, Margaret. *The Remarkable Encounter between George Walton and James Morton: Designs for Morton Sundour Fabrics Ltd.* *The Decorative Arts Society Journal*. Volume 30. 2006, page 96



preference for classic simplicity. Nevertheless, his aspiration for "tasteful sensibility"<sup>73</sup> hindered his ability to break from traditional conventions.

It was perhaps natural progression, but it is likely that demands from new clients encouraged Walton's speedy development from his early work, indeed from anything "a wee bit vulgar."<sup>74</sup> He was no longer in an industrial city ruled by commerce but the 'cultural centre' of Britain where established figures held to their principles in art and design. Walton would also have been aware of the RIBA's demands for institutional recognition of professionals rather than 'artist' architects.<sup>75</sup> Walton knew the restraints of a 'decorating company' title versus a Guild, and could have been embarrassed with, what was now, his diminishing connection to the Glasgow Style.

Similarly, he had to maintain an income from his relatively small decorating business. His company had to break through the monopoly of large retailing firms and it is likely that this led to contradictions in his work. At the outset of his career, he may have found that highly decorated interiors were the only way his work would win attention. He had to fulfil the expectations of an independent business whose future could be threatened if it produced only plain walls.

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<sup>73</sup> Neat, Timothy. *Part Seen, Part Imagined: Meaning and Symbolism in the Work of Charles Renee Mackintosh and Margaret Macdonald*. Canongate Press Ltd. London, 1994, page 117

<sup>74</sup> Percy, Clayre & Ridley, Jane. *The Letters of Edwin Lutyens to his wife Lady Emily*. William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd. Glasgow, 1985, page 50. Lutyens comments of Walton's work after visiting Buchanan Street tearooms

<sup>75</sup> This dispute was ongoing for twenty years. In 1911, it became statutory to restrict the legal use of the term 'architect' to those on a licensed register. Walton relied on presentation of his portfolio and he was received as a Licentiate Member on 20 July 1911





Plate 27: The White House, Shiplake, 1908



Plate 28: Geometric fireplace design at White House

Whatever the reason, the reality is that Walton's most successful building, The White House, (Plate 27) lost almost all connections to the Glasgow Style. George Davison commissioned the building in 1908. It was unique, in a "different class from other domestic buildings being produced in Britain."<sup>76</sup> The site's significant feature was its location along the River Thames, which inspired the glossy white render, reflecting the water and sunlight. The project emphasised

lightweight construction and openness, achieved by extending the windows from floor to ceiling. Nevertheless, the interiors were plain and little new furniture commissioned. Walton's former interest in pattern is only evident in the geometric design of the fireplace (Plate 28) and the wavy lines of the carpet. There is evidence that the impressionists' interest in natural light influenced Walton, yet the elongated proportions of the Palladian window at the rear of the house only prompts memories of the Glasgow Style.

By comparison, Mackintosh produced no building like The White House. His domestic architecture was undeniably unconventional but retained traditional construction methods to combat the Scottish weather. Mackintosh's wooden

<sup>76</sup> Moon, Karen. *George Walton: Designer and Architect*. White Cockade Publishing. Oxford, 1993, page 142



windows with leaded panes set deep into stonewalls contrast with the weightlessness of Walton's openings through seemingly lightweight walls. It is apparent that the location was the main inspiration in Walton's design. He won the opportunity to work in a more favourable climate where lightness and openness were appropriate concepts.

It was through Miss Cranston's continuing tearoom commissions that Mackintosh could reveal his designs in the Glasgow Style. He could afford to be radical because he was practicing in a specialist niche. Birkhauser describes the customers as people "who could never have lived with anything of the sort"<sup>77</sup> but it was absolutely the right approach and people's amusement was "tempered with admiration."<sup>78</sup> The tearooms became a theatrical experience, caught in the spirit of the times. Neil Munro captures the pleasure of Miss Cranston's clients in his short story 'Archie in an Art Tea-Room' where the characters venture to the tearoom with the "comic windows"<sup>79</sup> and "gey [sic] fancy"<sup>80</sup> interiors.

The publicity in Glasgow as the city became "a very Tokio [sic] for tea rooms"<sup>81</sup> meant Mackintosh became synonymous with their commercial environments and understandably, this would not have encouraged many private commissions. Furthermore, while Mackintosh was masterful at achieving unity, the client often

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<sup>77</sup> Birkhauser, Jude. *Glasgow Girls: Women in Art and Design 1880-1920*. Canongate Publishing Limited. Edinburgh, 1990, page 36

<sup>78</sup> Kinchin, Perilla. *Tea and Taste: The Glasgow Tea Rooms 1875-1975*. White Cockade Publishing. Oxford, 1991, page 109

<sup>79</sup> Munro, Neil. *Erchie & Jimmy Swan*. Introduced and annotated by Brian D. Osborne & Ronald Armstrong. Birlinn Ltd. Edinburgh 1993, page 100

<sup>80</sup> Munro, Neil. *Erchie & Jimmy Swan*. Introduced and annotated by Brian D. Osborne & Ronald Armstrong. Birlinn Ltd. Edinburgh 1993, page 101

<sup>81</sup> Muir, James Hamilton. *Glasgow in 1901*. Illustrated by Muirhead Bone, with a new introduction by Perilla Kinchin. White Cockade Publishing. Oxford, 2001, page 166



seems out of place. His furniture, most notably the high backed chair, was more successful in creating vertical emphasis than providing user comfort. Although this was appropriate in the tearooms where customer turnover was required, Mackintosh used the same chair in his home, showing his intention to create an aesthetic effect rather than an interior for living.

As a result, Walton's contribution to the promotion of the style was unmatched geographically by Mackintosh. Walton gathered a large audience by working in England and Wales. Although his work radically altered after his move to London, his childhood exposure to the Glasgow Boys ensured his work had inherent connections to the Glasgow Style. Reference to his key inspirations such as Whistler's peacocks or Morris' wallpapers were no longer visible but he continued to apply their theories through colour selection and surface finishes.



## Conclusion

This paper has illustrated the contributions made by Walton and Mackintosh to the development of the Glasgow Style and assessed the significance of their designs in terms of contemporary response and influence on the surviving legacy of the movement.

It is clear that Walton played a significant role in the development of the movement in its formative years which was crucial to its continuing growth. He also played an important role in increasing the movement's sphere of influence by completing many of his early, most successful schemes in the Glasgow Style outside the city; most notable was Rowntree's cafe in Scarborough. Walton is also credited as the first to establish the verticality of the new movement in his furniture designs. At the same time, Mackintosh was developing a philosophy that would become synonymous with the movement, but many of his early sketches were privately produced and did not influence the wider movement.

However, Mackintosh's British contemporaries did not see the value of his work and believed his radical designs were vulgar. In this manner, Walton achieved greater fame across Britain because the subtlety of his designs were more accessible and widely accepted. Nevertheless, architectural historians hail Mackintosh as the unrivalled innovator of the Glasgow Style. It is fair to conclude that Mackintosh's short fame was greatly deserved, even in the face of criticism, because his designs



were iconic. Mackintosh pushed the boundaries, whereas Walton did not have the talent or inclination to distort conventional proportions or question traditional concepts of beauty. It is credit to Mackintosh's bravery that his designs are testimony to the lasting impression of the Glasgow Style.

Nevertheless, Walton had great talent or he would not be credited by historians in reference to Mackintosh. It is undeniable that Walton was influential as an experienced furniture designer and there is strong evidence to suggest he inspired Mackintosh's high-backed chair. Although it is difficult to establish their individual contributions given they developed from the same movement, Walton certainly provided competitive stimulation that spurred Mackintosh. Mackintosh had a powerful ability to learn from his contemporaries and there is evidence that he took the best of Walton's ideas and improved them. Therefore, while Walton was creatively capable and merits greater recognition, Mackintosh's designs remain iconic of the Glasgow Style to this day.

Walton's contribution to the Glasgow Style was undoubtedly essential at the start of the movement, but it seems he did not have the ambition to develop this further. His move to London ultimately altered the style of his work and his most successful architectural project, The White House, only retained hints of the Glasgow Style. Nevertheless, Walton was generating greater attention than Mackintosh could achieve in Glasgow and his geographical spread of influence remained unmatched by Mackintosh. However, the arguments in favour of Walton's wide, but loosely associated, promotion of the Glasgow Style, or



advantage to present himself as 'artist architect', seem "beautiful, yet essentially meaningless"<sup>82</sup> when compared to the radical advances achieved by Mackintosh. Walton did not have the same energy as Mackintosh and vitality was important to carry the style into the future. Individualism was essential in the creation of a new style and although Walton plays an important part in this development, important enough to justify his introduction in the history of the Glasgow Style, Mackintosh is rightly remembered for his iconic designs.

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<sup>82</sup> Neat, Timothy. *Part Seen, Part Imagined: Meaning and Symbolism in the Work of Charles Renee Mackintosh and Margaret Macdonald*. Canongate Press Ltd. London, 1994, page 117



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Plate 3: Rijks Museum: armchair c. 1560-70, object number BK-NM-1009, visited 25 March 2012 <[www.rijksmuseum.nl/aria/aria\\_assets](http://www.rijksmuseum.nl/aria/aria_assets)>

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