

## Scottish Parliament Hearing

In a year that we celebrate Mackintosh's 150th birthday we have seen some highs and lows in the Mackintosh built heritage. The restoration of Mackintosh's only surviving Tea Rooms on Sauchiehall Street is a wonderful achievement. Work is about to begin to conserve and secure the future of The Hill House in Helensburgh. But the catastrophic fire in June that destroyed the Mackintosh Building at the Glasgow School of Art was a devastating blow to the world of Mackintosh. I still find it hard to believe this could have happened for the second time in four years.

The school are custodians of the Mackintosh Building (Mack) and must take some responsibility for both fires. The first fire in 2014 we know was caused by poor supervision and lack of adequate procedures to protect the building. There were also opportunities in 2008 to block off the ventilation ducts, which would have vastly restricted the fire.

After the 2014 fire the level of loss to the Mackintosh Collection was played down by the school and I was one of the few at the time to highlight this. As well as the destruction to the west wing of the Mack and the much loved Mackintosh Library and its contents, more than 150 pieces of Mackintosh furniture and his only two oil paintings were lost in the fire. The school has continued this PR spin over the last four years. A level of arrogance has set in that is not good.

For my own part, over the last four years I would have liked to have been more involved in the restoration project, but the processes in place made it extremely difficult for me to get access to the Mackintosh Building. This has to change, we need less secrecy and a lot more sharing of knowledge.

I know a lot cannot be decided until we have the full report on the cause of the fire, but questions need to be asked on what procedures were in place and why these were inadequate. I certainly feel a Public Enquiry is needed as a lot of people are angry at how this could happen a second time.

Regarding a rebuild, yes the school must be rebuilt in the same location Mackintosh designed it for, although I feel the GSA cannot oversee the rebuild of the Mack alone, a trust or expert panel must be setup. The rebuild also gives the opportunity to develop the Sauchiehall Street side and give this part of the city a much needed boost.

The future use of the Mackintosh Building (Mack) has been discussed a lot over the last 3 months. There is only one Charles Rennie Mackintosh - he was totally unique. A creative genius on a world scale of importance. He is frequently cited in the same category as international architects of the calibre of Anton Gaudi, Louis Sullivan, Victor Horta and Frank Lloyd Wright.

Over the last four years we have learnt so much more about Mackintosh and the Mack. The invaluable research by the restoration team gives us a great foundation to recreate every minute detail of this beautiful building.

Mackintosh used nature to great effect in the Mack, like good poetry it communicates an emotion. It has a presence that touches you in many different levels.

Mackintosh wasn't interested in the 'machines for living in' that the likes of Le Corbusier designed. His buildings are functional and restrained, but they are also beautiful, and that is what makes them so remarkable.

We have an architect and a building that is integral to the nation's self-belief and firmly embedded on the international stage. Rebuilding this masterpiece is a must and will showcase Scotland and Mackintosh's influential role in the development of contemporary design culture.

Over the last 30 years, Britain has witnessed the destruction and reconstruction of some of its most important historic landmarks: Hampton Court (1986), Uppark (1989), and Windsor Castle (1992) – all of which were restored to their former selves.

Rebuilding the Mackintosh Building must not be relegated to a mere museum, but remain a functioning art school, as Mackintosh created.

What matters is that the next generation of students can push open those swing doors, walk in and study art in the Mack.

**Stuart Robertson**

Director, Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society