

Letter to Charles Rennie Mackintosh

(after a trip to Hill House with Ruth Currie, grand-daughter of Walter Blackie, her husband Andrew and Anne Ellis, curator of Charles Rennie Mackintosh's Hill House, September 2019)

Dear CRM

I am writing to you from
your wonderful Hill House.
Ruth, Andrew, Anne and myself
have dropped in for a visit &
thought you'd like to hear how it is,
after more than a hundred years.
But I hate to have to let you know
the house is in lockdown,
sheltering in its box of chain,
isolating from wind and rain &
Ruth recalls the trek up Upper Colquhoun
each sodden, Sunday, childhood afternoon,
her grandfather at the door,
wrapped in rug, which didn't match
the colour scheme, the theme, pink roses
rambling round the walls,
her grandmother installed on
the only comfy chair.
She spies a sepia of Anna by the fire,
dramatic in a wide brimmed hat,
but Ruth assures she never dressed that way
day to day, while Walter, with his moustache kisses,
let her climb onto his knee, when wee,
to guzzle brandy snaps and cream in
his dream dwelling house.
The walls seemed dark, the windows small,
the hall was cold but toys and dress up clothes
tucked inside box seats were fun -
the metal Beatrix Potter figures,
a terrifying mouse's head,
Anna's wedding gown, in shreds
from when her father guised
one Helensburgh Halloween.
She loved the garret's trapeze rings &
used to swing along the rafters
but we are in the library &
Anne has swept a hand across the mantelpiece,
conjured up pipe racks, tobacco pouches &
long forgotten perfumes - Three Nuns & Old Holborn &
Ruth points out the desk's the wrong way round &

Anne has found the secret whisky hiding place &
Ruth looks up, thinks back to a ceiling,
black not white, repainted to match the shade of
pipe smoke, coal fire, gas light.
In the drawing room the stencils Anne revealed,
concealed when no-one had the skill &
wall lights which originally hung.
Upstairs we drift through bedrooms.
Ruth remarks they're small for all the children -
Alison, Walter, Agnes, Ruth and Jean.
The master bedroom, ivory stark and bright,
filled with natural light,
once draped with dreaming women was,
Ruth shares, where,
a boisterous boy, her father
launched himself at a ladderback
that cracked, broke.
She spoke of when her grandfather died,
in 1953, when she was eight,
and Anna and Agnes left.
We strolled the gardens,
once potato fields,
admired the views across the Clyde,
outside this boxed-up
Mackintosh masterpiece,
then on to Anne's for tea and cake &
a little toast to you.

Best wishes,

K







