

Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society

Summary of the 20th Annual General Meeting – 7 June 2025 (Hybrid)

Mackintosh Queen's Cross, Glasgow

Chair's Welcome – Michael Dale

Michael Dale opened the meeting by acknowledging an eventful year. He addressed a media controversy around the disposal of two church pews, which had been removed with Historic Scotland's permission in 2014 to create wheelchair access and stage space. The pews were not designed by Mackintosh. After years in storage, they were passed to Glasgow Architectural Salvage when no alternative home could be found. A Sunday Times article misrepresented this as irresponsible disposal of Mackintosh heritage; no other media pursued the story. The Society has since consulted Historic Environment Scotland and Glasgow City Council, and continues to seek a solution.

Minute of Previous AGM

Alison Brown raised two omissions from the 19th AGM minute: a member-supported proposal for a facilitated discussion on the Glasgow School of Art (agreed for autumn but not yet held), and a request to credit a former board member's in-kind contributions. Michael Dale acknowledged the GSA discussion had not taken place due to the political complexity of the issue, but committed to carrying the request forward. The minutes were approved with these amendments noted, proposed by Peter Trowles and seconded by Robyn Calvert.

Treasurer's Report – Raymond Henry

The accounts for the year ending December 2024 showed a deficit of £19,000, driven by a significant drop in donations and legacies (£133,000 vs £259,000 the previous year). Other income and expenditure remained broadly in line. Key balance sheet figures include heritage assets (the Queen's Cross building), investments of £901,000 held with Barclays Wealth (up £57,000), and cash at bank of £326,000. A new detailed expenditure breakdown (pp. 23–24) was included for the first time in response to member requests. The accounts were reviewed by TB Dunn & Co and approved, proposed by Monica Callaghan and seconded by Evelyn Silber.

In response to questions from the floor, the Chair explained that the Legacy Fund (£850,000) derives largely from a Monument Trust grant (£650,000+) and Creative Scotland COVID support (£200,000+), invested with Barclays at approximately 8% return. The funds are earmarked for building maintenance, including a boiler replacement costing c.£125,000. The Society does not currently have a published fundraising strategy; its approach is to generate revenue through events, pursue grants, and draw on reserves as needed.

Election of Directors and Office Bearers

Three directors stood down: Joseph James (deceased – obituary to follow in the Journal), Dai Vaughan, and Lisa Watt. Two new directors were nominated: Graeme Nicholls and Jennifer Russell. All continuing and new directors were approved by acclaim. Roger Bilcliffe continues as Honorary President for one further year. Eric Knowles was appointed as a new Honorary Vice-President. Professor Frank Walker OBE stood down after many years of service. The revised Society constitution, incorporating minor amendments from the previous AGM, was approved as a special resolution.

Director's Report – Stuart Robertson

Membership systems: The Society is migrating from an outdated Access database to VeryConnect, a Glasgow-based platform that will integrate membership management, event bookings and communications with the website.

Visitor numbers: 10,615 visitors in 2024, down c.2,500 on the 50th anniversary year (2023), which had benefited from the Gaia (the Earth) art installation by Luke Jerram.

Internship: PhD student Emma McCabe has joined as a funded intern (May–November 2025) to audit and catalogue the Society's archival and library collections and develop acquisitions policies.

Mackintosh/DSB Scholarship: The 2024 travelling scholarship was awarded to Julian Caldwell for a project on Art Nouveau and Art Deco preservation in Mexico City. Judging is underway for 2025.

The Macallan partnership: A major collaboration since 2021 has produced The Tree of Life collection – two limited-edition whiskies honouring Mackintosh. The Society will receive one of 112 limited-edition 46-year-old decanters for auction at Sotheby's in November. Macallan has previously donated £75,000 to the Society.

Heritage advocacy: Stuart and Michael met Angus Robertson MSP at the Scottish Parliament to discuss the decline of Glasgow's built heritage. In April, the Society hosted a Built Heritage Roundtable with cross-party MSP support, producing action points around VAT on restoration, CPO enforcement, the paused Buildings at Risk Register, and planning reform.

Retirement: Stuart announced his intention to retire after 25 years as Director, likely in early 2026. He highlighted key achievements in that time at the Society including the £1m Queen's Cross refurbishment (2006), the Mackintosh Festival in 2006, the Mackintosh Buildings Survey, UNESCO World Heritage bid, and the Macallan partnership. Also securing core funding from the Monument Trust. Succession planning is underway.

Queen's Cross Fabric Report – Stuart Robertson in absence of Greig Ingram

A quinquennial report has guided prioritisation of building works. Urgent projects include: repair of the gable wall suffering water ingress (est. £70–80,000, grant application to Glasgow City Heritage Trust for 40%); window restoration (est. £20–30,000, application to the Pilgrim Trust); side gallery plaster repairs; and sandstone maintenance. A GreenHatch Point Cloud survey and drone photography have been completed (£7,500). The boiler replacement (£125,000+) begins 4 August, closing the building for most of that month. A new fire alarm system linked to CCTV has been installed. Fire suppression remains under investigation but may be prohibitively expensive. Total works identified in the quinquennial range from c.£500,000 to £1.5 million.

Publications – Evelyn Silber

The Journal remains the primary member communication. Production costs approximately £3 per copy, but international postage can reach £6–9 per copy. Lyon & Turnbull have agreed a three-year sponsorship to help offset costs. A member survey on digital-only distribution is underway; responses so far favour retaining the printed edition. Editor Charlotte Rostek is stepping down and a replacement is being sought.

Events and Marketing – Michael Dale

Celtic Connections continues to be a success (14 concerts in 2025). The Society is seeking to attract more promoters to use Queen's Cross as a venue, though the lack of bar/catering facilities remains a constraint. Community engagement, including with local schools and housing associations, is a priority, though school transport budget cuts are a barrier.

Buildings and Interiors Report – Stuart Robertson

Stuart said he was giving the Report in the absence of the sub-committee convener Peter Ranson. The Glasgow School of Art Steering Committee has not met since November 2024, pending insurance arbitration. GSA is updating its Strategic Outline Business Case, with Reiach and Hall / Purcell Architects leading on architectural content, expected later in 2025. Paul Sweeney MSP has secured agreement from the Culture Secretary to explore a Special Purpose Vehicle for the restoration.

Other updates: The Hill House restoration continues under NTS; Scotland Street School is preparing its next phase of external repairs; work has commenced at the Conservative Club in Helensburgh; and Martyrs 'School may be sold to the Bishops 'Conference of Scotland as a museum. The sub-group is pressing for a full re-survey of Mackintosh's built legacy, updating the 2015–16 survey.

The boiler is being replaced. The gable wall shared with the Housing Association is also being repaired with possible grant aid from the Glasgow City Heritage Trust.

AOCB

After questions from the floor, the Chair thanked the staff, especially Stuart Robertson in what was likely to be his last AGM, Trustees and the many volunteers, ably managed by Sven, who worked in the building serving the public and helping out at events.

Members were invited to inspect the display of Macallan bottles and Mackintosh themed packaging.

The meeting ended at 12.30pm.

Key Dates and Actions

August 2025: Queen's Cross closed for boiler replacement.

September 2025: Tea for Two / Cha para Dois exhibition at Queen's Cross.

November 2025: Sotheby's auction of Macallan decanter.

Early 2026: Director succession planning and recruitment.

2028: Mackintosh 160th birth anniversary and centenary of death – planning for events and related activities underway.