



WALBERSWICK

LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

NEWSLETTER NO. 42

SEPTEMBER 2012

This is the last issue of the Newsletter which I shall edit. My task has been made very enjoyable by the enthusiasm of those who have contributed articles. Particularly noteworthy have been Maurice Godbold's painstaking research into the fishing industry and his interview with Freddie Eade, the last Walberswick fisherman; Barbara Priestman's account of proceedings in the Common Lands Charity in the C19th; and above all Richard Scott's series on some Walberswick characters of the recent past. In this issue he sheds new light on Rennie Mackintosh's visits to the village, reminding us that artists have always been drawn here. There have been other contributors too, among them John English and Brita Haycraft, and I thank them all. They have all helped give a sense of the unique character of the place.

Which brings me to Wally Webb. Wally, as far as I know, was not particularly interested in the History Group – but then he didn't need to be, because he embodied living history himself. He was one of the last people born in the village who was able to live and work here all his life. 50 years ago there were many families of whom this was true, who had been in Walberswick for generations, as Hanns Lange's wonderful study shows.

The loss of fishing and the mechanization of farming meant there was no longer any work in the village, and the second home phenomenon caused a squeeze on housing. Members of the old families have been obliged to disperse. There are still Kerridges living here, as well as Ketts, and representatives of the English, Cross, Church and Fairs families, among others. Time marches on and things change, but I want to end my span as editor with a tribute to those folk who were once the heart of Walberswick.

Julia Reisz, Editor

P.S Helen Baxter will now be taking over as Editor, and I am sure will bring a special enthusiasm to the task. She is a professional copy editor, which means the Newsletter will probably look much smarter in future! I wish her every success, and will of course help her in any way I can.

J.R.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Saturday 13 October

A Showing of Slides of Walberswick

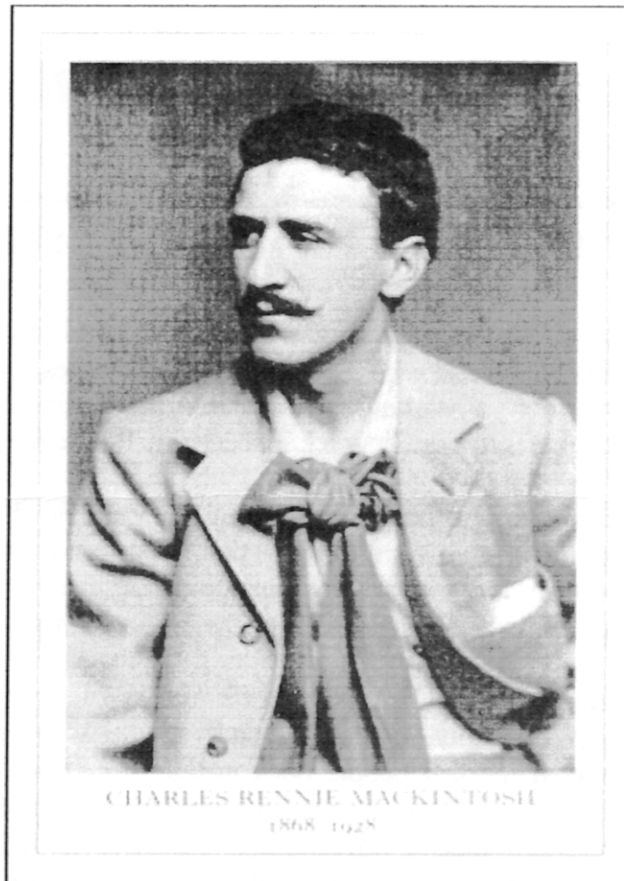
Saturday 8 December

History Group Christmas Party

Both at 7.30pm in the Village Hall

CHARLES RENNIE MACKINTOSH

Visits to Walberswick



The Scottish architect, artist and designer Charles Rennie Mackintosh came to Walberswick in July, 1914, at a time when his career and his health had reached a particularly low ebb, for what was intended to be a restorative summer break. The healing quality of the environment brought about a rapid improvement in his condition, but due to the onset of war he and his wife Margaret decided to extend their stay beyond the end of the summer as there was, at this time, little to entice them back to Glasgow. Unfortunately the Walberswick idyll turned sour before the year was up; some sections of the village community, believing him to be a war-time spy, turned against him and devoted themselves to incriminating him. Some writers airbrush this unpleasant piece of history from their accounts, while others place the blame on the 'unfriendly-to-outsiders' village residents. This is perhaps the most misrepresented part of Mackintosh's life history, unfair to him and to the village residents concerned. An attempt will be made here to present a balanced view.

We will also consider the evidence that he may have made briefer visits, mostly unmentioned by his biographers, in 1897, 1905 and, *very* briefly, in or around 1926.

General Background

With so much information about Mackintosh's life and work in circulation, a brief summary of his early years must suffice here. The fourth of eleven children (only seven survived infancy), he was born at 70 Parson Street, Glasgow, on 7 July, 1928. His father, William McIntosh (note spelling), was a policeman, described as a strict Presbyterian, ambitious for the welfare of his family. Their home was a small apartment, but with police promotion they were able to move to a slightly larger flat, and then to a terrace house. William's wife (born Margaret Rennie) died when still young. When he remarried in 1892 he adopted the now-familiar spelling of the surname – Mackintosh.

At school the young Charles McIntosh demonstrated an aptitude for drawing, but it was noted that he had problems with spelling; this difficulty remained with him throughout his life. He was also troubled by a minor malformation of one foot, which caused a permanent limp. In 1884, when he was sixteen, he started working as a pupil at the office of John Hutchison, a little-known Glasgow architect, and in the same year began attending evening classes at the School of Art, then housed in modest premises in Sauchiehall Street. The following year the youthful and energetic Francis Newbery was appointed Head of the School of Art; he and his wife Jessie recognised a rare talent in McIntosh, and in the years to come they were to become his most loyal and supportive friends.

1890-1910

These decades were to see phenomenally energetic progress in several directions. In 1889, after his five years of study with Hutchison and the School of Art, McIntosh became a draughtsman at a larger architectural practice, Honeyman and Keppie. Here he became involved in several substantial projects. A 'tip of the iceberg' survey of those most particularly involving Mackintosh's creative vision would have to include Miss Cranston's Tea Rooms (1896-97), the new Glasgow School of Art (first phase, 1896-99), Windyhill (1900-01), A House for an Art Lover (for Alexander Koch, 1900-01), and the second phase of the School of Art building (1907-09). He eventually became a partner in 1904, but not having had capital to invest in the practice the process had been convoluted and much delayed. Before this time convention required that drawings for projects – even those he had designed from scratch – had to be attributed to the supervising partner, John Keppie. When the second phase of the School of Art got under way, John Keppie was the on-site architect, leaving McIntosh to devise and draw up the innovative detailing for which the building is noted. He bore with fortitude the press reports of the time, which heaped praise on 'John Keppie's masterpiece'. One person who had always been aware of the extent of Mackintosh's input was the School's Director, Francis Newbery, and as time passed the School of Art came to be seen, justly, as *Mackintosh's* masterpiece.

During this 20-year span Mackintosh produced a great deal of his distinctive furniture, and undertook commissions for interior design, fabric design and much else besides, in addition to his architectural work with Honeyman and Keppie. In 1893 a small but, with hindsight, important event occurred: in what seems to have been a deliberate attempt to reinvent himself. He commissioned the pioneer photographers T & R Annan of Sauchiehall Street to take what we would now describe as publicity photographs of him. In the one on the opposite page he presents himself casually yet carefully dressed as an artist, and is no longer just the architectural draughtsman. Other changes happen at this time: in addition to adopting the new spelling of his surname he takes on the nickname, to family and friends at least, of 'Tosh' or 'Toshie', rather than the previous 'Charlie'.

Mackintosh's closest friend at this time was Herbert McNair, who had been a fellow pupil at the School of Art; the two now worked together at Honeyman and Keppie. They met, and eventually married the Macdonald sisters, Frances and Margaret. Bertie McNair married Frances in 1899, and Margaret married Mackintosh in 1900. 'The Four', as they became known, embarked on several working projects together, enjoying much more success in Europe than in Britain. In 1900 Mackintosh was invited to show with the Viennese Secession, which brought him into contact with Koloman Moser, Josef Hoffmann and other influential figures of the time. Further invitations followed, in Vienna and Turin. All this happened beside the 'day job' with Honeyman and Keppie.

Expeditions

Over his working lifetime Mackintosh found time to make a number of expeditions, armed with sketchbooks, recording meticulously the details around him. While still attending Art School he

won a travelling scholarship; his 'Grand Tour' in 1891 took in the whole length of Italy from south to north. Starting in Palermo he took in Naples, Rome, Florence, Siena and Verona, as well as Paris, Brussels and Antwerp on the homeward stretch. Later tours were generally closer to home, and included Holy Island in 1901 (the Mackintoshes had spent their honeymoon there the previous year), the Cotswolds in 1894, Dorset in 1895, East Anglia in 1897 and 1905 and the Kent/Sussex border in 1909 and 1910.

In this short survey, the East Anglian tours are of particular interest. His 1897 sketchbooks contain some searching drawings of an ornate lamp-standard in Halesworth, the pulpit, tower and other details in Southwold church, and several detailed studies of the patterned flintwork at what appears in official records as 'Blythbury' (but can be readily identified as Blythburgh) church. This is one of several instances of Mackintosh's difficulty with spelling; he had no trouble though, with the elegant lettering in the cartouches. He also drew at Westhall, Wenhaston, Reydon, 'Tuggleshall' (Uggeshall), South Cove, Bramfield and Framlingham.

The 1905 tour was slightly less mysterious. This time there is much stronger evidence that Mackintosh stayed in the village with his wife Margaret. It is thought that they lodged with the Thompson family at what is now *Seascape*, on The Green. Phoebe Thompson was at this time acting as nanny to the Newberys' daughter Mary, and would have been one of the relatively few local people with whom the Mackintoshes came in close contact. Phoebe's daughter Margaret Thompson (later Margaret Orbell, who has featured in this series) often spoke of her mother's great fondness of the Mackintoshes – especially Margaret - and said that she had been named after her as a result of this visit.

Later Years in Glasgow

After the completion of the final phase of the School of Art, Mackintosh's career entered a bleak phase. Depression and illness began to take hold. In 1913 he left Honeyman and Keppie, but these were lean times and there was a complete absence of clients. By the beginning of 1914 desperation was setting in, and it was clear that a radical change of direction had to be made. Here, Francis and Jessie Newbery were ready with a rescue plan. With Margaret's agreement it was suggested that the Mackintoshes would benefit from a long summer break in Walberswick. The Newberys still had their rolling summer lease on *Roofree*, and felt sure they could find suitable accommodation nearby for the Mackintoshes and, perhaps, one of the converted riverside fishing sheds to use as a studio.

Arrival in Walberswick

The Mackintoshes arrived in Walberswick in early July, 1914. The accommodation the Newberys had found was next door to their own, at *Millside*, then a boarding house run by a Miss King. The Mackintoshes rented an upstairs room for the summer months. The Newberys had found a studio next to their own, on the river bank, large enough for Mackintosh to work, and for Margaret to continue work on the large panels she had brought from Glasgow. At this time several former sail lofts and net sheds were finding a new use as studios, and by the 1920s a large number of such buildings were clustered on or near the river bank, mostly just upstream from the steam ferry slipway.

Settling in

Quite soon there was a discernible improvement in Mackintosh's condition, and he began work on some of his flower studies. These were continuing a theme which he had pursued previously, most notably at Withyham and Chiddingstone, near the border between Kent and Sussex, some four years previously - but had started as early as 1901, at Holy Island. Just weeks after the arrival of the Mackintoshes in Walberswick, though, war was declared and the idyll which had been pre-war Walberswick, an off-the-beaten-track Suffolk village, was shattered as a military presence was established; and some of the large houses which had recently been built as second homes were requisitioned for military occupation. By autumn harsh restrictions were imposed and would be strictly enforced, not by air raid wardens as in World War 2, but by 'special constables' recruited by the police.

Those who had to venture out after dark must not carry any kind of illumination. Photography, sketching and painting must not be done close to the beach, river or military installations, and the underlying message was 'your safety is entirely dependant on the strict observance of the rules'.

The Flower Drawings

At first, Mackintosh was able to proceed with his now well-known flower studies, using freshly cut specimens of commonly grown garden flowers. An underlying plan was that these studies would be published in book form and printed in Germany, where reproduction of this kind had reached an advanced pitch, but with the onset of war this was suddenly out of the question. Compared with his earlier flower studies, the thirty he produced in Walberswick had a sense of formality and completeness, hinting that they were being produced for a purpose. The most-reproduced and familiar are *Christmas Cactus*, *Fritillaria*, *Japanese Witch Hazel*, *Jasmine*, *Larkspur*, *Petunia*, *Rosemary* and *Veronica*.

It is difficult to suppress a sense of outrage that Mackintosh should have found it so difficult to market his work at the time of its creation. Now, you can have these drawings as prints, cards, table mats and so on. The Mackintosh 'industry' extends to replica furniture, clocks, gift-wrap, wall hangings, and much else besides created 'in the style of'. One can only feel that if the Mackintoshes could have had just a tiny percentage of the turnover of the industry which would never have existed without them, the quality of their lives would have been transformed. When Margaret died in 1933 the entire Mackintosh estate, including furniture, fabrics, Margaret's gesso panels, a great many paintings, numerous folders of drawings, plus their own personal belongings, was valued at £88-16s-2d.!

Topographical Drawings

During 1914 Mackintosh also produced some topographical drawings and water-colour paintings of riverside subjects along the Blyth, from which it is clear that some harbour reconstruction work was in progress, with pile-drivers in place. There is no evidence at this early stage that he was running into any trouble with either the military authorities or with the constabulary; these drawings and paintings were all dated 1914; the full force of the restrictions did not take hold until much later in the year. The flower studies were drawn indoors, from cut specimens.

At this time the Mackintoshes decided to stay on in Walberswick after the summer. If there was so little work to be found in Glasgow in the last years of peace, things could only be worse with a war in progress. Quite soon, Margaret returned to Glasgow to let their house for one full year, many people believing at the time that this would be approximately the duration of the war.

In Walberswick several visiting artists stayed on through the summer of 1914. This certainly included the Newberys, but it appears to have been their last summer in the village after nearly twenty years of such visits. Their daughter Mary stayed on for another month, but after this one imagines that the Mackintoshes must have started to feel isolated. They had been far from friendless, but most of their social contacts in the village were drawn from summer visitors with similar interests. Their contact with local people was generally restricted to those who provided accommodation or other necessities.

The tenancy at Millside expired at the end of the summer, and they are thought to have moved briefly to the Anchor, a short distance down the street. Soon they were able to rent space at Westwood Cottage, where the painter and plantsman Arthur Rendall – who had been a student with Philip Wilson Steer in London and Paris - had a studio.

The Onset of Trouble

When visiting artists drifted away in early September, it became a matter of local curiosity that the Mackintoshes did not depart too. Why could this be? What are they doing here? Rumours circulated that they had been involved in some *avant garde* exhibitions in Vienna (details of this could easily

be found in *Who's Who, 1914*) and Turin – and wasn't he friendly with some Germans? It is clear that Mackintosh was completely unaware of the growing unease. He was totally immersed in his work, and took no action to defuse a problem he had not noticed. The writer remembers that c.1951 village elders were recalling that notable visitors to the village in these earlier times had included 'the spy who had posed as an artist', and it was clear that nearly four decades later many still believed this to be true.

Some biographers have been content to accept the easy explanation that the cause of the rift was his foreign-sounding accent, and that local people were so insular that they were ready to exclude anyone from elsewhere. We should remember in this connection that the village had for several decades been a popular destination for artists, and these had included a significant proportion of Scots. There had been no problem then; a healthy symbiosis had existed. Also there was the annual influx of Scottish drifters and fisher-girls following the herring shoals down the coast each autumn (rather different accents from Aberdeen and Fraserburgh, of course, but still 'foreign').

The most obvious reason for the jumpiness of some local people lay in the fact they had been told that their safety was heavily dependent upon strict observance of the tight regulations regarding, particularly, blackout. Few ventured out after dark. It soon became obvious, though, that the mysterious incomer with the Highland cape and deerstalker was taking a more relaxed attitude. We learn from Catharine Carrington's writings that 'Toshie' had been in trouble with the authorities for being 'careless with his blackout', and that on his evening walks by the river he carried not only his sketchbook but a camera – perhaps the most forbidden accessory of all. The late Blucher English recalled that as a boy of eight he would follow Mackintosh on some of these 'solitary' walks in order to practise his imitation of the limp!

The Mackintosh lantern (probably one of the sort made and sold by gypsies in the Edwardian years), and often mentioned by people wishing to incriminate the hapless artist, led to an allegation that he had been signalling to foes on the high seas from an upper window at Westwood Cottage (there were neither houses nor mature trees in the way at this time). Returning home one day he was arrested at the front door by a soldier. His room was being searched, and correspondence from the German architect Hermann Muthesius and from Viennese contacts was confiscated. Mackintosh, taken completely by surprise, was outraged. Muthesius, particularly, was a family friend of many years' standing and his son Ektar was Mackintosh's godson. How *could* they do this to him? With hindsight, it is clear that those in the village campaigning to get Mackintosh removed were simply frightened.

Mackintosh was held in (almost certainly) house arrest and banished by the military authorities from the counties of Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire for the duration of the war. He sought help from his old friend Professor Patrick Geddes to clear his name at the War Office; Geddes was abroad but his daughter Lady Mears had some success - but the 'three counties' ban remained in place. His release from local custody was secured by Catharine Carrington's father Philip Alexander, one of Mackintosh's few close friends still in the village, who lived at *Far End* in Millfield Road and was a noted silversmith and metal-worker in the Arts and Crafts tradition.

Chelsea Years

The Mackintoshes had many friends among the artistic community in Chelsea, still one of the cheaper places to live in London. They rented a studio in Glebe Place, which remained their base for eight years, and they were able to survive on a few smallish commissions and Margaret's meagre income. Few of the architectural and interior design commissions that came his way during these years reached completion. One that *did* come to fruition was 78 Derngate, Northampton, a radical make-over of the exterior and interiors in a terrace house near the town centre. The client, W J Bassett-Lowke, was supportive and enthusiastic in ways that brought out the best in Mackintosh. The

house is open to the public, and is the closest place to Walberswick where a complete piece of the master's work can be seen.

In 1920 the Mackintoshes went to Worth Matravers in Dorset with their Chelsea friends Randolph Schwabe and his wife Birdie. Schwabe had studied at The Slade and in Paris, and would a few years later be appointed Slade Professor of Fine Art. At Worth Matravers Mackintosh produced watercolour landscapes of a kind which laid the foundations for his final series of works executed in the south of France between 1923 and 1927, in which the emphasis was placed very much on the geometrical division of the surface. In the Dorset works the geometry was provided by rooftops and distant field divisions combined, to mark a real coming together of Mackintosh the designer and Mackintosh the artist

The South of France

By 1923 life in Chelsea had become an uphill struggle. The Mackintoshes discovered that thanks to the exchange rate at the time they could live very cheaply in France. They could be hotel residents there for much less than it was costing to be lodgers in Chelsea. They sub-let their studio and headed first for Collioure (popular with artists) but moving on to the more workaday Port Vendres, close to the Spanish border. Here they stayed for nearly four years during which Mackintosh focused on producing his formalised landscapes. He and Margaret returned to London in 1927, when the need for medical treatment (for both of them) had become acute. Mackintosh was suffering from cancer of the tongue, and died on December 10, 1928. He had for some time been unable to speak.

Postscript

The brief visit to Walberswick of Mackintosh (without Margaret, it seems) less than two years before his death is rather mysterious. The late 'Ginger' Winyard stated that Mackintosh made a brief visit – probably just for two or three nights, staying at the old Anchor pub shortly before it was dismantled, transplanted to a site further up the street, and re-named *Anchorlea*. The purpose of this visit is not known.

A fully detailed bibliography would take a great deal of space, but information has been drawn from the writings of Colin Baxter, Roger Billcliffe, Alan Crawford, Murray Grigor, Philip Long, John McKean, Alistair Moffat, Richard Murphy and Pamela Robertson.

Richard Scott