

The Landmark Trust

THE MACKINTOSH BUILDING, COMRIE, PERTSHIRE

Until 1980, when Alastair Kirsop, a student from the Mackintosh School of Architecture in Glasgow, completed his dissertation, the Mackintosh building in Comrie was largely unknown and unrecognised. Mr and Mrs Ray Smith, a retired couple, had bought the flat on the first floor in the early 1970's, quite unprepared for the interest that was about to be taken in it. Before long, however, Mackintosh enthusiasts were knocking on the door, asking to see round, and gradually the Smiths came to take an equal interest in their own property. They had been about to remove the fireplace from the sitting room but, upon learning of its designer, they immediately gave up the idea.

When they decided to move in 1984, Mr Smith was concerned that any new owner, besides caring for the property, should make it possible for more people to see the flat and he asked his lawyer to approach the Landmark Trust.

The Trustees were immediately interested; the building at Comrie is a minor one, but it dates from the years in which Mackintosh was doing his finest work, 1903-4, and it is still very complete, both the flat and the shop having retained most of their original fittings. In particular they saw the importance of flat and shop being re-united in one ownership, to safeguard the future of the building as a whole. As a step towards this the flat was bought by Landmark early in 1985, in the days when the backing of our Founder's Manifold Trust still made such acquisition by purchase possible.

The architect for the restoration was Stewart Tod, who had worked at several other Landmarks in Scotland. The flat needed a complete overhaul; the wiring was out of date, and the plumbing untidily exposed. The original Mackintosh decoration had disappeared long ago under layers of wallpaper and paint, all of which had to be stripped off. Some of the original dark green stain used on the woodwork had survived on the sitting room fireplace, and on the back of the sitting room door, and so the rest could be restored to match it. As work progressed a patch of original wallpaper was uncovered in the kitchen and, above the door, some distemper, which must have formed a 'frieze' along the top of the wall, above the wallpaper. Both patches have been left showing.

Two fireplaces had been removed; one from the small bedroom, which must have made it awkward to furnish, and one from the kitchen. The latter was replaced with a surround which, like the cupboards and shelves along the wall, were designed to fit in with the surviving Mackintosh details. The local joiner who made these, and the bathroom cupboard, took great trouble, as did all the men from Carmichael's, the building firm who did the work, to see that every detail was finished to the highest standard.

The green fittings in the bathroom were almost brand new, so after some qualms it was decided to keep them, and they did seem to fit in with the rest of the decoration quite well. Throughout the flat, apart from the cupboards already described, and new storage heaters, nothing has been added to the original design. The curtain rail in the sitting

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room was replaced by one less aggressively shiny, and the curtains themselves were hand printed by Jennifer Packer, who made many of the curtains for Landmark.

The furniture in the flat is almost entirely the work of early 20th century architects and designers, such as Baillie Scott, Gordon Russell and Heal's, in most of which the influence of C.R. Mackintosh can be detected, as in so much that came after him.

All the work was carried out very quickly and the flat was ready by the end of 1985. Then in 1986, Miss Hamilton, grand-daughter of the Mr Macpherson who was inspired to commission Mackintosh to rebuild his shop, agreed to sell the shop below to Landmark, and so the original aim of uniting the two has been realised. She continued to run it, however, until her retirement, when it was taken over but it continues to be run as a store in which you can buy goods for every eventuality, everything that you can imagine or wish for over one counter.

The Landmark Trust is a building preservation charity that rescues historic buildings at risk and lets them for holidays. The Mackintosh Building sleeps up to 4 people.

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