

16 June 2025

DELVE INTO DESIGN MYSTERIES AND LOST LOVE BEHIND MACKINTOSH AT THE WILLOW ON INTERNATIONAL KISSING DAY

Cultural historian Dr Robyne Calvert will shine a light on the lesser-known romantic inspirations behind the beautiful interiors at the National Trust for Scotland's Mackintosh at the Willow with a special talk on Sunday 6 July, International Kissing Day – a celebration of romance and affection.

Dr Calvert will welcome guests to the world-famous tea rooms, to focus on the exquisite Salon de Luxe with its ornate décor and luxurious colour palette, reminiscent of the Scottish suffragette colours. Her talk will share how the couple, Charles Rennie Mackintosh and 'Glasgow Girl' Margaret Macdonald, were inspired by the acclaimed pre-Raphaelite artist Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Willowwood sonnets on lost love. The event is part of a series of ongoing events in the lead up to 2028, which marks the centenary of Mackintosh's death, the centenary of Equal Franchise for Scottish women winning the vote, and the 200 year anniversary of Rossetti's birth.

Oliver Braid, Creative Learning Manager for Mackintosh at the Willow, said: "Visitors always fall in love with the Salon de Luxe, its bewitching details and important links to Scottish women's history. Margaret Macdonald's work is central to the room's design, with interest in her work significantly growing in recent years. This talk will help us understand how Mackintosh and Macdonald took inspiration from another creative and translated this into the design of our unique space, here at Mackintosh at the Willow on Sauchiehall Street. The event will help to bring people back to Sauchiehall Street as it undergoes major developments into an area of significant culture and heritage for the city of Glasgow, and to help us think more about the city as it celebrates its 850th anniversary."

Dr Robyne Calvert said: "For the interior of this dazzling room, Mackintosh enlisted the aid of his wife, Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh. Specifically, Macdonald crafted a gesso panel for this room, arguably amongst her most beautiful, titled after the first line in the third sonnet of Rossetti's cycle of four, *O Ye, All Ye That Walk In Willowwood*. The *Salon de Luxe* is a quintessential example of how the Mackintoshes engaged with Symbolist practices in the creation of a *gesamtkunstwerk*—a total work of art. The panel may be viewed as a narrative key to understanding the space's meaning."

Dr Robyne Calvert is a cultural historian, teaching across the University of Glasgow's College of Arts & Humanities. A Mackintosh expert, her book *The Mack: Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Glasgow School of Art* (Yale University Press) won the 2024 Alice Davis Hitchcock Medallion for Architecture, sponsored by the Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain.

A Talk about the Rossetti's Willowwood and the Mackintoshes takes place at Mackintosh at the Willow, 217 Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow G2 3EX on Sunday 6 July at 1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. Tickets cost £7 and can be booked at Eventbrite: **A Talk about the Rossetti's Willowwood and the Mackintoshes Tickets, Sun, Jul 6, 2025 at 1:00 PM | Eventbrite**

Now in the care of conservation charity the National Trust for Scotland, the Mackintosh at the Willow is in the original Willow Tea Rooms Building, first opened by Miss Cranston in 1903 and was designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh in collaboration with his wife, Margaret Macdonald.

This commission resulted in one of the most spectacular heritage attractions in the city, with jewel-like interior designs and a frontage that pay testament to the unique vision of Mackintosh and Macdonald.

The thoughtful restoration by The Willow Tea Rooms Trust, with the support of The National Lottery Heritage Fund and many others, gifted back to the nation an exceptional example of architectural heritage. The Trust began to care for Mackintosh at the Willow in January 2024, thanks to support from its members and donors as well as a generous package from The National Lottery Heritage Fund to enable the transfer.

In December 2024, The National Lottery Heritage Fund awarded a generous £1.1 million package of development funding for ***Mackintosh Illuminated***, a project that will spotlight Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Margaret Macdonald, sharing, celebrating and inspiring as many as possible with their creative genius and the beauty of their creations. The project will help make Mackintosh and Macdonald better known and appreciated, internationally and at home, by creating an online learning resource and an expanded programme of property-based community and education work in Helensburgh and Glasgow. The project also encourages more people to visit both sites to get a richer picture of the pair's skill and versatility. By working in partnership with other Mackintosh stakeholders in Glasgow and more widely, this support will aid in organising celebrations for the 2028 anniversary of Mackintosh's death and the 160th anniversary of his birth. The funding is also enabling the Trust to continue the vital conservation work at the Hill House, including the full removal of the current render, to find a replacement material which will resolve the longstanding damp issue, remove the Box in 2028 and provide updated, permanent visitor facilities, including a café, shop and toilet facilities at the site on Upper Colquhoun Street in Helensburgh.

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Notes to editors

Images: <https://www.flickr.com/gp/133918740@N04/0K9rTQ417v>

Mackintosh at the Willow re-opened to the public on 7th September 2018 after an extensive restoration. The original Willow Tea Rooms Building was initially opened by Miss Cranston and designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh with design input from his

wife, Margaret Macdonald in 1903. Mackintosh first worked for Miss Catherine 'Kate' Cranston in 1896, designing murals of her new Buchanan Street tearooms. In 1898, he then worked on her existing Argyle Street tearooms designing the furniture and interiors and by 1900 Miss Cranston commissioned him to redesign an entire room in her Ingram Street tearooms (the restored Oak Room from which is now on show at V&A Dundee). This ultimately led to a commission for the complete design of the proposed new tearooms in Sauchiehall Street in 1903. Mackintosh for the first time was given responsibility for not only the interior design and furniture, but also for the full detail of the internal layout and exterior architectural treatment. The resultant building came to be known as the Willow Tearooms, now known as Mackintosh at the Willow, and is the best known and most important work that Mackintosh undertook for Miss Cranston.

About Mackintosh at the Willow

Mackintosh at the Willow became a part of the National Trust for Scotland's portfolio of properties in January 2024, following a generous support package from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to enable the transfer, in addition to assistance given by the Royal Bank of Scotland, Architectural Heritage Fund, Celia Sinclair Thornqvist and her husband, Rolf Thornqvist and Glasgow City Council.

About The National Lottery Heritage Fund

As the largest dedicated funder of the UK's heritage, The National Lottery Heritage Fund's vision is for heritage to be valued, cared for and sustained for everyone, now and in the future as set out in our strategic plan, Heritage 2033. Over the next ten years, we aim to invest £3.6billion raised for good causes by National Lottery players to bring about benefits for people, places and the natural environment. We help protect, transform and share the things from the past that people care about, from popular museums and historic places, our natural environment and fragile species, to the languages and cultural traditions that celebrate who we are. We are passionate about heritage and committed to driving innovation and collaboration to make a positive difference to people's lives today, while leaving a lasting legacy for future generations to enjoy.

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About the National Trust for Scotland

Established in 1931, the National Trust for Scotland is Scotland's largest conservation charity and cares for, shares and speaks up for Scotland's magnificent heritage. Over the last 90 years the Trust has pioneered public access to and shared ownership of some of the most magnificent buildings, collections and landscapes in Scotland. It cares for more than 100 sites, from ancient houses to battlefields, castles, mills, gardens,

coastlines, islands, mountain ranges and the plants and animals which depend upon them.

In March 2022 the National Trust for Scotland launched *Nature, Beauty & Heritage for Everyone*, its ten-year strategy which sets out the ambitions of the charity over the coming decade. From speaking up for Scotland's heritage which doesn't have a voice, to improving the lives and wellbeing of people across the country, and responding to the climate and biodiversity crisis, the Trust will build on its work in recent years to grow its impact and conserve and restore more of Scotland's heritage, as it moves towards its centenary in 2031.

Scotland's largest membership organisation, the National Trust for Scotland relies on the support of its members and donors to carry out its important work. For more information on the National Trust for Scotland visit www.nts.org.uk. The National Trust for Scotland is a charity registered in Scotland, Charity Number SC 007410.