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TRUST TAKING SAMPLES FOR NEXT STAGE IN SAVING HILL HOUSE

Conservation charity the National Trust for Scotland has confirmed that its conservation project to dry out Charles Rennie Mackintosh masterpiece the Hill House in Helensburgh is working.

From Monday 29 April to Friday 3 May, conservation experts will be taking samples from the interior of the building to further build the picture of the extent of damage that has been happening steadily over a century of water penetration - and how much this has been reversed by the protection of the Box.

The house will be closed to visitors while this work is underway - the walkways, café, shop and garden will remain open.

Samples taken from the outside of the house in late 2023 have already showed that the structure is drying out, as planned.

Since it was built in 1904, the Hill House has been badly affected by the driving rain of Scotland's west coast. Over a century of dampness was damaging both the structure of the house, dissolving the brick and affecting its unique bespoke interior decoration which was the work of both Mackintosh and his wife Margaret MacDonald.

In 2019 the National Trust for Scotland installed a pioneering protective steel mesh box structure over the house, to act as a barrier to the elements and enable the house to gradually dry out as the first stage in a long-term conservation programme.

Now a series of samples are being taken from key internal points in the house which have been badly affected by water ingress - the living room, dining room, drawing room, guest bedroom, wine room and larder . These will provide conservators with more information about how the building has been affected by water, and if there was any inherent defect in either the materials used originally or the manner in which they were used in the construction. This will help inform future decisions about the conservation works needed to repair and restore the building which is now one of the few remaining Mackintosh creations which is open to the public.

At the same time, the charity will reopen all the chimneys and fireplaces to encourage airflow around the building and continue the drying process.

Project Director Elizabeth Davidson said: "We are at a really exciting stage in our work at the Hill House. The Box has been doing its dual job of preventing further water from

impacting on the building, and also allowing the structure, which in some places was very wet indeed, to dry out gradually.

“We’ve been closely monitoring this process and this sampling helps us gain more insight into how the building is responding to the drying process. Relative humidity in the house is now down to acceptable conservation standards - a remarkable achievement given the very visible areas of rain penetration previously through microcracking in the structure.”

Once the analysis is complete, the next major milestone in the Hill House project will be the complete removal of the render. This is planned for late 2024.

Ian McLelland, Regional Director for the South & West said: “This project gives visitors a great insight into the detailed and technical work needed to care for the Hill House - a place of international importance and one of Mackintosh’s finest. And with the Mackintosh at the Willow now also part of the National Trust for Scotland, we can also show how he approached a completely different commission. We are really privileged to care for two brilliant and contrasting Mackintosh places which show the full scale of his unique vision and approach, inspired, much like our charity itself, by Scotland’s nature, beauty and heritage.”

The Hill House project has been supported by many generous funders, including the Getty Foundation’s Keeping It Modern initiative, the National Trust for Scotland USA Foundation and donors to the Box the Hill House appeal.

From January 2024, the National Trust for Scotland now proudly safeguards two architectural gems by Charles Rennie Mackintosh — the Hill House and Mackintosh at the Willow. Mackintosh (1868–1928) was a luminary in Scottish architecture, design and art, and left an indelible mark on the Arts and Crafts movement. Renowned for his avant-garde approach, he seamlessly melded traditional Scottish elements with influences from Japanese design and the art nouveau style. His architectural masterpieces epitomise his dedication to functional yet aesthetically pleasing structures. To donate in support of the charity’s work to protect Mackintosh’s legacy, visit <https://www.nts.org.uk/campaigns/charles-rennie-mackintosh>.

Through its 10-year strategy, ***Nature, Beauty & Heritage for Everyone***, the National Trust for Scotland is working on a range of projects across Scotland to stabilise and improve the condition of its estate and has recently completed major repair and restoration projects at Brodick Castle on Arran and Craigievar Castle in Aberdeenshire.

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Notes to Editors

Images - <https://www.flickr.com/gp/133918740@N04/r614A3hK39>

1. The Hill House was constructed in Helensburgh between 1902–04 based on a commission given to Charles Rennie Mackintosh by publisher Walter Blackie.
2. The radical design of the house was a great influence on German and Austrian architects, including Walter Gropius and the Bauhaus movement, and in turn can be said to have been pivotal in the direction of modern architecture in the 20th century.
3. Blackie lived in the Hill House until his death in 1953 and it was eventually acquired by the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland (RIAS) in 1972 (having been Grade A listed the year before) and the National Trust for Scotland in 1982.
4. The Getty Foundation awarded the National Trust for Scotland £95,000 in 2015 to come up with a solution to the water ingress that had been damaging the Hill House for decades. A 'containment' interim solution was arrived at in 2017 through a proposal to build a sheltering box over the property; ground was broken to construct a 165-tonne steel frame and chainmail structure in December 2018 and it was then opened to the public on 7 June 2019.
5. Surveys conducted in 2022 and 2023 have shown that the box is doing its job in drying out the Hill House and work is progressing to complete the process and employ a solution to water ingress with the box due to be removed by 2028.
6. The National Trust for Scotland is the conservation charity that over 90 years has saved, maintained and shared many of the country's most loved places, rich with history, heritage, nature and culture. The charity celebrates Scotland's heritage and with more than 100 places in its care, there's a place for everyone to love. The National Trust for Scotland relies on the support of its members and donors to carry out its important work of caring for the natural and built heritage that people from Scotland and across the world all love, ensuring its future for everyone to enjoy. Support the National Trust for Scotland and help them protect the places we all love. Become a member at www.nts.org.uk

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.