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National Trust for Scotland becomes the 'safe haven' for famous Charles Rennie Mackintosh Tea Rooms on Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow

Scotland's largest conservation charity, the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) today joined The Willow Tea Rooms Trust to announce that Mackintosh at the Willow, in Glasgow's Sauchiehall Street, is to become part of the NTS's portfolio of heritage properties.

The Trust's intervention, made at The Willow Tea Rooms Trust's request, following difficult trading conditions which threatened the future of Mackintosh at the Willow, has secured this important and original work by Charles Rennie Mackintosh. Enabled by support from its members and donors, the National Trust for Scotland is using £1.75 million of its reserves and acquisition funds to secure the property, with vital additional help given by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, the Royal Bank of Scotland, the Architectural Heritage Fund (AHF), Glasgow City Council, Celia Sinclair Thornqvist MBE and her husband, Rolf Thornqvist. As a result, the property will continue trading as normal with many jobs preserved.

Mackintosh at the Willow, which dates to 1903 and was purchased, saved and restored by Celia Sinclair Thornqvist MBE and The Willow Tea Rooms Trust between 2014 and 2018, is the last remaining original of the several tea rooms designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh, working with his wife Margaret Macdonald, for pioneering Glasgow entrepreneur Miss Catherine 'Kate' Cranston.

Supported by The Heritage Fund, and others including Scottish Enterprise and Glasgow City Heritage Trust, the restoration resulted in one of the most spectacular heritage attractions in the city, restoring and recreating jewel-like interior designs and a frontage that pay testament to the unique vision of Mackintosh and Macdonald.

The early 20th-century patrons of the tea rooms had never seen anything like these designs before and they quickly became a popular setting in which to socialise, particularly for women seeking a safe space for refreshments and conversation. The tea rooms are cited worldwide in architectural histories as one of Glasgow's most important contributions towards modernism and they were, alongside Mackintosh and Macdonald's other works, highly influential in Europe and elsewhere from the moment of their opening.

Although the tea rooms have in the last year attracted over 230,000 visitors, the cumulative impacts of the disruption caused to Sauchiehall Street by the second fire at the Glasgow School of Art and the COVID pandemic had adversely affected the tea rooms' income, despite the underlying business model being sound. As a consequence, given the importance of the site to Scotland's national heritage, the National Trust for Scotland was approached last year to consider options that would ensure the tea room's long-term security and sustainability.

Phil Long OBE, the National Trust for Scotland's Chief Executive, said:

"Mackintosh is one of the greatest architects of the 20th-century, respected internationally for his breathtaking and innovative design. People from around the world travel to Scotland to see his and his wife Margaret Macdonald's brilliant work together. As the custodians of one of Mackintosh's other rare masterpieces, the Hill House (on which Macdonald also collaborated), we see the acquisition of Mackintosh at the Willow as a perfect fit.

"The brilliant 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 that we are proud to bring into our care.

"Despite difficulties that were outwith the control of The Willow Tea Rooms Trustees and the management team, the work they have done with their staff in welcoming visitors, running community learning and outreach and in providing an exceptional heritage experience is exemplary – and we are certain we can build on their achievements to ensure the long-term sustainability and survival of this wonderful place on behalf of Glasgow and Scotland.

"I want to pay tribute to the foresight of our own Board Members for their support of our partnership with The Willow Tea Rooms Trustees, which has averted the risk of potential closure and safeguarded this vitally important place for the future, and also to our members and supporters whose generosity over the years has given us the financial means to acquire, secure and protect Mackintosh at the Willow alongside all of the other historic and natural treasures we care for on behalf of the people of Scotland.

"The prospects for Mackintosh at the Willow, and for the City of Glasgow, are genuinely exciting: through the work of Glasgow City Council and the Lottery-funded Heritage Places scheme, redevelopment is underway, with ambitions to return Sauchiehall Street to a cultural corridor better linking together such surrounding world-class institutions and venues as The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall, and the Theatre Royal. We are looking forward to the National Trust for Scotland playing a part in this transformation through our new responsibility for Mackintosh at the Willow.

"I'm sure the members of the National Trust for Scotland, especially those living in Glasgow and the West of Scotland, will welcome this addition to our portfolio and the opportunity it gives them to enjoy the excellent tours and exhibition on offer, not to mention the mouth-watering offers within the tea rooms.

"We're welcoming the existing workforce into the National Trust for Scotland family: the insight and expertise they have will be a great benefit to us and will be instrumental in ensuring that Mackintosh at the Willow continues to welcome visitors.

"I particularly want to thank The National Lottery Heritage Fund, the Trustees of The Willow Tea Rooms Trust, the Royal Bank of Scotland, the Architectural Heritage Fund, and Glasgow City Council. as well as many other individuals and supporters, for their very welcome encouragement and help in bringing about today's announcement."

Celia Sinclair Thornqvist MBE, Founder, Past Chair and Trustee of The Willow Tea Rooms Trust (WTRT), said:

"From the beginning, it was our aim to restore and conserve this last remaining and most beautiful example of Mackintosh's masterful designs for tea rooms to the highest possible standards.

"Through this new partnership, I am delighted and relieved that a way has been found to sustain this global icon in Glasgow and Scotland, so that it can continue to be protected and shared.

"I alone cannot take all the credit for the initial rescue of Mackintosh at the Willow and proving its worth. Many others played a part: From the Prince's Trust (now the King's Trust), whose trainees under The Willow Tea Rooms Trust's management demonstrated the viability of establishing a social enterprise providing training and education; to The National Lottery Heritage Fund and other generous charitable trusts for the vital support they offered which enabled the financial independence needed to allow us to function as a living, breathing museum.

"Fate though intervened: Unexpected events in the form of the two serious fires at the Glasgow School of Art closed down Sauchiehall Street for many months and were followed by COVID lockdowns and yet another fire nearby. These proved to have baleful impacts on our trading and business plan. We were able to survive this despite the odds but it was proof of the vulnerability of a single standalone charitable Trust, and it was resolved that we needed to find another way forward.

"Together with the other Trustees I sought a safe haven to protect the integrity of the building, its decoration, the services provided and, last but not least, the dedicated staff responsible for those services. We wanted to ensure that Mackintosh at the Willow

would be in the hands of people who shared our ethos and passion for the heritage this place represents – and that is why we are so glad that we have been able to come to this arrangement with the National Trust for Scotland.”

Ian Dickson BEM DL, Chair of The Willow Tea Rooms Trust, said:

“While Mackintosh at the Willow’s business plan has been working well, particularly over the last year, the years before, from the point when we opened in 2018, were exceedingly difficult.

“Together, the cumulative effects of the second catastrophic Glasgow School of Art Fire and the street closures it caused and the serious troubles that quickly followed as a result of the COVID pandemic had very significant adverse impacts on us financially and, made it increasingly difficult for us to continue to operate.

“I am truly delighted, therefore, that The Willow Tea Rooms Trust and the National Trust for Scotland have, after many months of discussion and negotiation, reached this agreement under which we are entrusting Mackintosh at the Willow to the care of the NTS.

“The two principal concerns of my Board of Trustees were firstly to ensure that the future of the iconic original Willow Tea Rooms building, as lovingly and carefully restored by The Willow Tea Rooms Trust, was preserved for the benefit of Glasgow and, indeed, the Nation and secondly that the jobs of our wonderful workforce were also secured.

“The agreement which we have reached with the National Trust for Scotland addresses these concerns and achieves both of these objectives and I and my Board firmly believe that, as an important part of the NTS portfolio, Mackintosh at the Willow will go from strength to strength. The NTS is, in our view, the ideal ‘safe haven’ for Mackintosh at the Willow.

“At this juncture, I would like to pay tribute to the NTS Executive Team for the highly co-operative and constructive way in which our discussions and negotiations have been conducted, to our funders (including especially The National Lottery Heritage Fund) for their support over the last ten years, to my fellow Trustees, both past and present, our Expert Mackintosh Advisory Group and our Chief Executive for the quite extraordinary levels of dedication, commitment and sheer hard work which they have given to our project and, of course to our Founding Chair and Patron, Celia Sinclair Thornqvist, without whose inspiration, leadership and dedication, the project simply would not have happened.

Eilish McGuinness, The National Lottery Heritage Fund Chief Executive, said: “We are delighted that the Mackintosh Tea Rooms will become a permanent part of the National Trust for Scotland collection, ensuring that this unique part of Scotland’s heritage is protected and cared for into the future.

“Since 2017 we have supported The Willow Tea Rooms Trust with £4.9 million as they oversaw the brilliant restoration and interpretation of the tea rooms. Operating under challenging circumstances, they have continued to care for this heritage of national and international importance, ensuring access to visitors from the city and beyond. The NTS will build on this positive foundation, and we applaud their ambition and commitment in recognising the heritage importance of Mackintosh at the Willow for Glasgow, Scotland and their members.

“The Heritage Fund recently announced that Glasgow is one of 20 areas around the UK to benefit from a share of investment over the next 10 years from our new £200 million Heritage Places programme. Mackintosh has a special place in Glasgow’s story and the NTS will ensure Mackintosh at the Willow has a place at the heart of how future generations of Glaswegians and visitors engage with the city’s cultural and built heritage.”

Mackintosh at the Willow will formally become one of the National Trust for Scotland’s properties with effect from 19 January 2024. However, members of the Trust will be able to enjoy access to the property’s excellent exhibition for free from 12 January.

The property is within walking distance to the National Trust for Scotland’s Tenement House in Glasgow’s Garnethill, which offers a contrasting but complementary experience of Glaswegian life at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. The tea rooms also join other Trust properties in the region – Alexander ‘Greek’ Thomson’s Holmwood in Cathcart and Greenbank Garden in Clarkston.

Charles Rennie Mackintosh’s Hill House, which is currently undergoing a multi-million-pound restoration under a protective ‘box’, is also owned by the National Trust for Scotland and is just over an hour away from Glasgow by train.

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Notes to Editors

Images - <https://www.flickr.com/gp/133918740@N04/4049U4na5h>

1. **Background information on Mackintosh at the Willow** can be found at:

<https://www.mackintoshatthewillow.com/our-story/>

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.

2. Mackintosh at the Willow will formally become a part of the National Trust for Scotland's portfolio of properties on 19 January 2024 – this follows 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.
3. National Trust for Scotland members will be able to enjoy free access to the Mackintosh at the Willow exhibition with effect from 12 January 2024.
4. **Charles Rennie Mackintosh** is perhaps the greatest and best-known Scottish architect. He was born on 7 June 1868 to Margaret Rennie McIntosh at 70 Parson Street, Townhead, Glasgow, the fourth of eleven children and second son of William McIntosh, who eventually rose to be the City of Glasgow Police's superintendent and chief clerk. William changed his surname to the Mackintosh spelling but it was around 1893 before Charles also did so. Mackintosh attended Reid's Public School followed by Alan Glen's High School in Cathedral Street. At the age of 15, in 1884, he was apprenticed to John Hutchinson, an architect and enrolled for evening classes in the Glasgow School of Art, which at that time was situated in Rose Street. He went on to specialise in architecture. In 1889, while still attending the Art School in the evenings, he joined Honeyman and Keppie, architects and in 1890 won an Alexander Thomson Travelling Scholarship, which enabled him to travel to Italy and examine classical architecture at first hand. This was the beginning of a prolific period and one of great personal change for Mackintosh. He met Margaret MacDonald in 1892 after he and a fellow apprentice at his practice, Herbert MacNair were introduced to her and her sister Frances by 'Fra' Newberry, the head of the Glasgow School of Art. Charles and Margaret married in August 1900. Mackintosh was made a junior partner in the firm in 1901 upon the retirement of John Honeyman. The commissions he completed (or was involved in) over this period are astonishing: They include the interior of Craigie Hall, Dumbreck and the new saloon and gallery of Glasgow Art Club, 185 Bath Street, Glasgow (1893); Glasgow Herald Offices, Glasgow (1895); Glasgow School of Art (1896–1909), considered the first original example of Art Nouveau architecture in Great Britain; Windyhill, Kilmacolm (1899–1901); the Willow Tea Rooms (1903) and Daily Record Offices, Glasgow (1904); and Scotland Street School, Glasgow (1904–06).
5. **Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh** was born on 5 November 1864 in Tipton, Staffordshire (between Birmingham and Wolverhampton). Her father was a colliery manager and engineer. Both Margaret and her younger sister Frances attended the Orme Girls' School, Newcastle-under-Lyme. By 1890 the family had settled in Glasgow and both sisters enrolled as day students at the Glasgow School of Art studying courses in design. There, she worked with a variety of media, including metalwork, embroidery, and textiles. Additionally, she joined other groups, such as the Scottish Society of Watercolour Painters in 1898. She began collaborating with her sister Frances, and in 1896 the pair worked from their studio at 128 Hope Street, Glasgow, where they produced book illustrations, embroidery, gesso panels, leaded glass and repoussé metalwork. Their innovative work was inspired by Celtic imagery, literature, symbolism, and folklore. She was well-regarded by her peers as an exceptional artist and designer in her own right. Charles Rennie Mackintosh said of his wife: "Remember, you are half if not three-quarters in all my architectural work ..."; and "Margaret has genius, I have only talent." During the 1890s, Macdonald produced wide-ranging and innovative work in watercolours, graphics, and metalwork, much of this carried out in collaboration with sister Frances

and Herbert McNair. The designs were characterised by distinctive stylisations of human and plant forms, creating linear, often symmetrical patterns from interlocking limbs, swirling hair and tendrils. She created several important interior schemes with her husband. Many of these were executed at the early part of the twentieth century; and include the Rose Boudoir at the International Exhibition at Turin in 1903, the designs for House for an Art Lover in 1900, and the Willow Tea Rooms in 1903. She exhibited with Mackintosh at the 1900 Vienna Secession, where she was an influence on the Secessionists Gustav Klimt and Josef Hoffmann. They continued to be popular in the Viennese art scene, both exhibiting at the Viennese International Art Exhibit in 1909.

6. **Miss Catherine 'Kate' Cranston** was born on 27 May 1849 in Glasgow. Her father, George Cranston, was a baker and pastry maker and in the year of Kate's birth, he became proprietor of the Edinburgh and Glasgow Railway Chop House and Commercial Lodgings at 39 George Square in Glasgow city centre. The hotel was renamed the Royal Horse, then renamed again in May 1852 to become Cranston's Hotel and Dining Rooms. In part influenced by the Temperance Movement, tea rooms became fashionable by the 1880s and Kate was already becoming something of a trend-setter having opened her first tearoom, the Crown Luncheon Room, on Argyle Street in 1878. She foresaw that patrons demanded more than just high-quality food and drink and ensured that the settings and interior designs of her businesses were exceptionally stylish and attractive. She also recognised that women needed their own spaces and created ladies-only rooms which proved exceptionally popular among the burgeoning middle-class. While the tea-rooms survived into the 1930s, Kate had branched out into other businesses, including a cinema and in 1917 gave Mackintosh a last commission with the design of an extension of the Willow Tea Rooms into the basement of the building next door to create 'The Dug Out' in a style that anticipated Art Deco. She died in 1933 at home in 4 Terregles Avenue, Pollokshields. Her status as one of Scotland's most important female entrepreneurs was recognised in 2018 when it was announced that she would feature on a design for The Royal Bank of Scotland £20 note - the first woman other than Queen Elizabeth II to be depicted on a Scottish banknote
7. **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. Follow @HeritageFundUK on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram and for Scotland @HeritageFundSCO on X/Twitter. @HeritageFundScotland on Facebook and use #NationalLotteryHeritageFund www.heritagefund.org.uk
8. 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 92 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.

9. **Non-Affiliation Disclaimer** – The Willow Tea Rooms Trust is a Scottish Charity (SC044931) and custodian of the Original Willow Tea Rooms Building on Sauchiehall Street. Mackintosh at the Willow is the operating company and wholly owned subsidiary of the Trust. We are not affiliated or associated with, or in any way connected to, the commercial business, The Willow Tearooms situated on Buchanan Street, Glasgow and we do not endorse or authorise that business.