

The Landmark Trust

THE MACKINTOSH BUILDING History Album



Written by Charlotte Haslam 1986

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The Landmark Trust Shottesbrooke Maidenhead Berkshire SL6 3SW
Charity registered in England & Wales 243312 and Scotland SC039205

Bookings 01628 825925 Office 01628 825920 Facsimile 01628 825417
Website www.landmarktrust.org.uk

KEY FACTS

Built	1903-04
Architect	C.R Mackintosh
Acquired by Landmark	1985
Architect for the restoration	S.Tod
Builders	J. Carmichael & Sons
Restoration completed	1985

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Summary

Until 1980, when Alastair Kirsop, a student from the Mackintosh School of Architecture in Glasgow, completed his dissertation (for which see the following pages), 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, for example, been about to remove the fireplace from the sitting room but, upon learning of its designer, they immediately gave up the idea.

So when, in 1984, they decided to move, Mr Smith was concerned that any new owner, besides caring for the property, should make it possible for more people to see the flat. He had heard of the Landmark flat in Mackintosh's Hill House, Helensburgh (no longer a Landmark property), so he asked his lawyer to approach the 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.

The architect for the restoration was Stewart Tod, who had also done the work at Hill House, and 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 The flat needed a complete overhaul; the wiring was out of date, and the plumbing untidily exposed.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, which all had to be stripped off. Some of the original dark green stain used on the woodwork had survived however 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 linoleum in the kitchen, which fitted both for design and size, came from the lodge at Saddell in Kintyre, recently acquired by the Landmark. It was brought from there by Mr and Mrs Tod on the roof of their car, rolled up and secured to a board, and singing melodiously like an organ- pipe all the way, as the wind whistled through it.

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 room was replaced by one less aggressively shiny, and the curtains themselves were hand printed by Mrs Packer, who makes many of the curtains for Landmark, with the same design that was used at Hill House.

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 it 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 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.



Main Street, Comrie, 1860. The seismic observatory on top of Brough and Macpherson's building is a prominent feature. Comrie has always been famous for its earthquakes, as the highland boundary fault lies to the south of the village. The first recorded earthquake centred on Comrie took place 5 November 1789 and further smaller tremors were felt up to the 'great earthquake' of 23 October 1839. This phenomenon aroused the interest of local inhabitants, and in the early 1800s a small group formed themselves into the Comrie Pioneers to study local earthquakes. In the 1830s they averred to have studied some 7300 tremors from the observatory. The group pioneered instruments for recording and measuring the tremors and the first seismometer was designed and made for them in 1841 by Professor J.D. Forbes of Edinburgh. The owner of the shop in Comrie's Main Street, above which the observatory was placed, was one Peter MacFarlane, postmaster, who was responsible for the building. He stands in the foreground wearing striped trousers. The observatory was removed later in the century.

The Dissertation

What follows is a transcript of Alastair Kirsop's dissertation on the Mackintosh building in Comrie which provides an in depth analysis of the history and architecture of the building. Please bear in mind that this dissertation was written before the Landmark Trust took over the restoration of the building.

We apologise for the poor quality of the photographs which were taken from a photocopy of the dissertation. We have supplemented these with better quality photographs of the buildings from our own sources.



Comrie, Comrie Street 1890.

The Mackintosh Building

Comrie 1903-5

A dissertation for the Mackintosh School of Architecture, Glasgow.

Alastair H Kirsop, June 1980.



Comrie, Dundas Street 1904

Acknowledgements

My thanks first of all are due to Professor Andy MacMillan on whose suggestion I undertook this study, and also to Ian Ballantyne, both of the Mackintosh School of Architecture, for his encouragement, support, and indeed his patience in awaiting the completion of this document.

Special thanks are due to the proprietors of the building: Mr Frier of Mitchell & Thomson, Solicitors; Mr and Mrs. Smith; and especially Miss Norah Hamilton; for their assistance and for allowing unrestricted access for the purpose of the survey.

I am also grateful to Mr. Stephen Connelly, Archivist, Perth and Kinross District Council; Miss Susan Payne, Perth Museum and Art Gallery; and the District Council Planning Department for their help. I must also express my gratitude to Dr Micheil MacDonald, Curator and Secretary, Museum of Scottish Tartans, Comrie, Mr. Phillips, 'The Strathearn Herald', Crieff, for the newspaper archives, unfortunately, as it turned out, on both occasions to be publication day; Mrs MacVean, Keppie, Henderson & Partners for allowing examination of the Job Books of Honeyman & Keppie; Pamela Reekie of the Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow; and to all others, too numerous to mention, to whom I am indebted for their assistance.

Finally, I would like to thank the Rev. Donald W. MacKenzie, Minister of The Barony Church, Auchterarder, although it proved to be John Keppie who was the partner in charge of the design and construction of the new church between 1900 - 1905. Unfortunately, there appears to be no connection between the church and Mackintosh's work in Comrie.



Dundas Street, Comrie 34065

Summary

The purpose of this study is to put on record the Mackintosh building in Comrie by means of the facts contained in this document and, having carried out a survey of the building, by means of a set of measured drawings. To date, very little is generally known with regard to the building which is situated in the heart of the village and serves as a shop, office and flat to three separate proprietors.

Mackintosh designed this building to replace an earlier one which had been substantially destroyed by fire. The earlier building had stood for many years although at one time it had undergone major alterations and had been refaced, changing its appearance from a harled building in the true Scottish vernacular tradition to a more sophisticated stone-faced Victorian building. The cost for the building designed by Mackintosh was realistic for that period and the result is a building of true Mackintosh character boasting many fine features. This commission was undertaken by Mackintosh at the height of his architectural career although it is not certain how he came to receive the commission.

The building sits on a corner site within the village and the main external feature is the corner turret. One unusual feature is that it cuts across the lower storey of the building short of the corner whilst conventionally overhanging on both facades. Externally, there are many typical Mackintosh features but one other unusual feature is the two 'blind' dormers on the roof of the lower section of the building. Internally, there are many features, most noticeably the doors, the counter and shop fittings, and fireplaces. The finest fireplace is situated in the living room of the flat which also boasts a corner bay window created by the turret.

The future prospects for the building generally look good although problems might arise if the shop ever changes hands.

This study has recorded all the information which I have managed to uncover although some questions still remain unanswered. Hopefully, these answers will be found in the future.

Preface

Charles Rennie Mackintosh was a man of exceptional ability. His talents emerge in a whole range of artistic fields from architecture to interior and furniture design, from watercolour painting to poster graphics. Much has been written about him with reference to various projects and especially with regard to the sources of his inspiration and the development of his style. In recent years several authors have isolated specific subject areas from the general background and produced detailed studies of these. However, as the search for more information continues and more facts are uncovered, it must be realised just how incomplete many of these works are. For as long as Mackintosh remains a current 'hero' this search will probably uncover a great deal of new material, quickly making most of the studies outdated in the sense of being complete works.

The Mackintosh building in Comrie is one example which highlights this situation. The earliest published reference to this building I have been able to find is in an article by David Walker which appeared in 'The Architectural review' as far back as November, 1968. None of the standard works on Mackintosh, such as the books by Thomas Howarth and Robert Macleod, mention this building and what is surprising is the fact that the more recent books by Jackie Cooper and Roger Billcliffe ignore Comrie completely.

The aim of this study is to redress this situation by recording those facts which I have been able to uncover and, having carried out a measured survey, by producing a set of record drawings (no known drawings exist). I have discovered that several references to the building which have appeared in the past contained factual errors and I hope to clarify these points and provide a background for further search.

Walker, David, '*Charles Rennie Mackintosh*', *The Architectural Review*, vol. 1441 (Nov. 1968) pp. 355 et seq.

This article was later included in the following book:

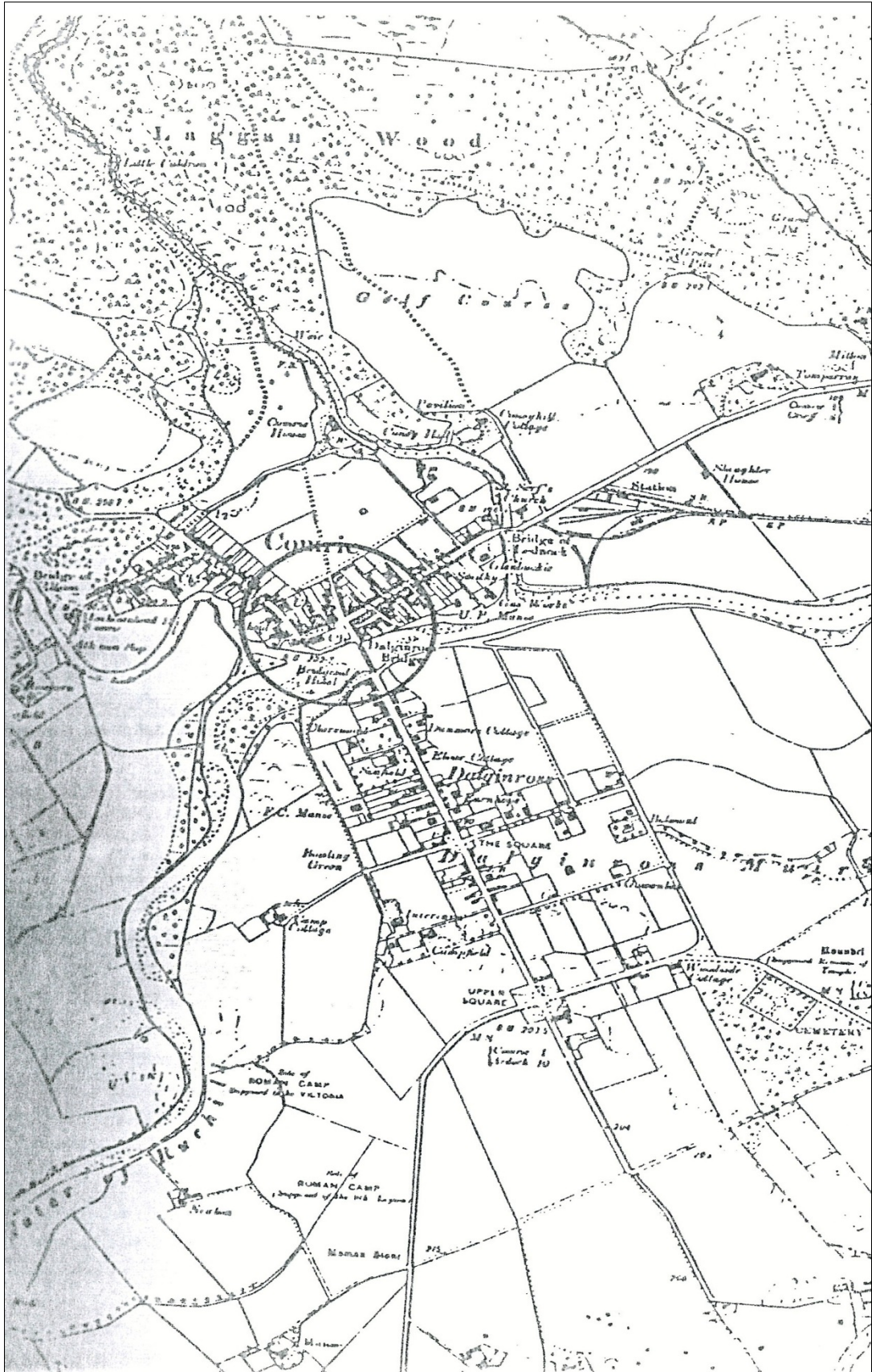
Richards, J. M. and Nikolaus Pevsner (editors), *The Anti-Rationalists*, (Architectural Press).

Howarth, Thomas, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement*, 2nd. ed., (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1977).

Macleod Robert, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh* 1st ed., (London: Hamlyn, 1968).

Cooper, Jackie (with an introduction by Barbara Bernard), *Mackintosh Architecture*, 1st ed., (London: Academy Editions, 1978).

Billcliffe, Roger, *The Complete Furniture, Furniture Drawings and Interior Designs of Charles Rennie Mackintosh*, 1st ed., (Lutterworth Press, 1979)



Location plan

Introduction

In the heart of Comrie, at the focal point of the whole village, is a white-washed, harled building with corner turret and steep-pitched roof. This building, a prominent landmark, was designed in 1903 by Mackintosh for a local draper, Mr Peter Macpherson.

The building is situated on a corner site (see Location Plan) in the village main street (Dunira Street, which becomes Drummond Street) opposite its junction with the main road from Braco and the south. Adjacent to the Mackintosh Building is a small square (Melville Square) in which is also situated the Royal Hotel. Across the main street is the graveyard of the Old Parish Church, now no longer used for worship but as the Comrie Youth Centre.

The building itself is basically L-shaped, the main part being situated on the corner with a smaller section in Dunira Street. Both parts consist of three-storeys, the top floor in both cases accommodated within the roof space. The accommodation in the main section comprises of:

1. a draper's and ironmonger's shop which occupies the entire ground floor and is owned by Miss Norah Hamilton, grand-daughter of the late Peter Macpherson;
2. on the first floor a private flat belonging to Mr & Mrs R.W Smith; and
3. within the roof space, on the second floor, a suite of 2 rooms and W.C. which originally served as tailors' workrooms belonging to the shop, with access provided by an external stair which now no longer exists.

The other part of the building accommodates solicitors' offices the ground and first floors which belong to the firm of Mitchell & Thomson. A common stair is located in this part of both the flat and solicitors' first floor Offices. Throughout the roof space above is a study/bedroom with direct access from within the flat.

An early photograph, taken around 1860, looking down the village main street shows a large, white harled building occupying the site of today's Mackintosh building. It comprised of three-storeys, the top storey, as in today's building, accommodated in the roof space. Near the corner, a large gable dominated the facade and rose to ridge height to support a glazed observatory with balcony. The shop, which at that time was owned by Mr Peter MacFarlane, the postmaster, had a very elegant shop front with bold fascia and a series of pilasters. The scale of this building was large when compared with the other buildings situated in the main street, and it was obviously a powerful landmark in Comrie at that time.

Comrie is situated just north of the Highland Boundary Fault which runs across Scotland from Helensburgh in the south-west to Stonehaven in the north-east and separates the Highlands of from the Central Lowland Belt. Due to occasional movement along this fault, earth tremors are sometimes felt in Comrie.

'This peculiar local geological phenomenon aroused the interest of some of the inhabitants for in the early 1800's there was formed a small group of local men known as the Comrie Pioneers, comprising two local ministers, the cobbler and the postmaster. In the 1830's, this group studied no fewer than 7,300 tremors, and developed a method of measuring their intensity. The postmaster, Peter MacFarlane, devised one of the earliest scales of intensity, which he used when recording the tremors.'

The observatory situated on top of the building was used by Comrie Pioneers for this purpose.

A later photograph of around 1900 shows a Victorian building occupying the site, the shop now called 'Brough & Macpherson'. Mr. Peter Macpherson became the sole proprietor in 1896 although the building was still owned by the Brough family. This building has a smooth facade which sets off moulded architraves to all the windows, string mouldings and rusticated quoins. Comparing this building with the earlier one, we see that the shop front is unchanged, and closer examination reveals that the first floor fenestration is identical. The window on the gable has been altered to match those of the first floor and it would appear from the photograph that another gable has possibly been added to the left of the original one, as shown by the pencil markings on the photograph. It would appear that the original building has, therefore, been refaced in smooth ashlar and many detailed alterations carried out on the facade. No factual evidence has come to light regarding these alterations but it would seem likely that these changes were carried out for aesthetic reasons which were fashionable in the late 19th century. To understand the extent of these feelings one has only to compare this photograph with that taken 40 years earlier to see how the buildings in the main street had changed during that period. By the turn of the century many of the earlier buildings had been replaced by truly Victorian buildings of a larger scale, faced in coursed ashlar and intricately detailed. Nowhere is this change more noticeable than the corner building erected diagonally opposite Brough & Macpherson's with its large two-storeyed corner turret and domed roof. Compare this with the previous building! These changes are an indication of the prosperity which existed during that period and the 'spirit' of this age was probably the reason behind the alterations to the Brough & Macpherson building.

However, this building could not have lasted long for disaster struck on the 29th May, 1903, when much of it was destroyed by fire. The following report appeared in 'The Strathearn Herald' on the day following the fire, Saturday, 30th May:

' Disastrous Fire at Comrie - yesterday

Brough & Macpherson's Premises Destroyed. Damages nearly £3000.

What is probably the most serious fire that ever occurred in Comrie broke out on the premises of Messrs Brough & Macpherson, drapers and ironmongers, at an early hour yesterday (Friday) morning, and in the course of a few hours the large block of about three storeys high and its contents were totally destroyed.

The premises occupied what is the most prominent business site in the village, and had a frontage to Dunira Street and Melville Square. The shop was closed, as usual, about half-past eight o'clock the previous night, and all was seemingly right then. Shortly after twelve yesterday morning, however, while a man belonging to the village was returning home from the country, he noticed smoke issuing from the window in the back shop, facing the Square, and he at once raised an alarm. The Fire-Brigade and many of the villagers speedily turned out, and a cyclist was also despatched to Crieff for the assistance of the Fire-Brigade there. The local firemen, meanwhile, showed great pluck and energy in their attempts to cope with the raging flames, which by this time had obtained a strong hold of the shop, and the captain of the Brigade - Mr. John McLaren - and one or two others, especially deserve high credit for their splendid work.

Seeing there was little hope of saving the blazing pile, their efforts were mainly confined to cutting off the fire from extending to the adjoining block of buildings forming the Royal Hotel premises, and situated on the north side, as well as the shop and house property on the west side, and in this they were fortunately successful, as the office of Mr J. P. Mitchell, solicitor, which forms part of the

block, and two work rooms above, occupied by Messrs. Brough & Macpherson, were saved. The Crieff Brigade arrived on the scene about half-past two, but by this time the work of destruction was far advanced. They, however, lent excellent service in extinguishing the fire, there being a plentiful supply of water obtained from the river Earn nearby. Most fortunately, there was no wind to fan the flames – the night being calm and still – otherwise there is every reason to fear that the conflagration would have been still more serious. As it was, nothing but the walls of the building are left standing, the stock &c., being wholly destroyed. Fortunately, the books of the firm, &c., enclosed in a safe, have escaped. The building was a pretty old one, and it is anticipated that the walls will be razed to the ground.

The property belonged to Mrs James Brough, Wellpark, Comrie, and is, we understand, insured; while the occupants (Messrs Brough & Macpherson) had also their stock, & c., well covered by insurance.

During the currency of the fire there was a large crowd of the inhabitants present, and much excitement prevailed. General sympathy is felt for Mr Peter Macpherson, the sole partner of the firm, in the great loss and inconvenience which he will suffer, and it is hoped he will speedily find temporary premises to carry on his large and lucrative business in the village.'

Almost four months later, in the same newspaper, on 19 September, 1903, the following report was published:

'New premises - Mr P. Macpherson, of the firm of Brough & Macpherson, has purchased the site where their premises were before they were burnt out, and plans are being prepared to have the shop and other parts rebuilt. The front wall

is to be built from the ground, and considerable alterations will be made on the part facing Melville Square. The ground floor will be shops, the erection will be three storeys high.'

These report, together with the historic photographs, confirm that the smaller section of the present building in Dunira Street was part of the building shown in the earliest photograph (1.1 a) and was saved from the fire; the external wall facing Melville Square was also saved and retained up to first floor level, while the remainder of the present building was newly designed and constructed. The latter report indicates that Mackintosh designed the new building during the second half of 1903 and information obtained from the Job Books of Honeyman & Keppie confirms that construction work began early in 1904 and continued for over a year.

The contractors, the dates of acceptance of the tenders, and the contract sums given in the job Books are summarised overleaf.

Mason and Brickwork J.McCowan, Comrie	27 Jan 1904	£851	3/4
Joiners Samuel Carmichael & Son, Comrie	27 Jan 1904	£853	9/3
Plumbers C. Anderson, Crieff	30 Jan 1904	£184	10/1
Plasterers Jas. Gowie, Crieff	30 Jan 1904	£110	
Slaters Joe Williamson, Comrie	30 Jan 1904	£106	8/9 ³ / ₄
Painterwork Peter Mills, Comrie	27 Sep 1904	£19	
Window and Sun Blinds James Hutchison		£26	9/6
Iron Doors Messrs Mathew & Platt		£6	1/8
Total Cost		£2,157	2/7 ³ / ₄

To provide some indication of the real value of this contract, I list below the approximate costs of three contracts carried out by Honeyman, Keppie & Mackintosh around this time:

New Parish Church and Church Hall at Auchterarder.

Construction work commenced June 1904 and was completed July 1905.

Cost in the region of £6,500.

Scotland Street School, Glasgow.

Designed 1904, constructed 1905/6. Cost £.16,000.

Auchinbert, Killearn (private house).

Designed 1904, constructed 1906. Cost just over £4,000

Bearing in mind the relative sizes of these buildings, the cost of the Comrie building would appear to be realistic for the work involved. It would not appear that it was a '*fairly cheap job*' built to '*an extremely tight budget*' as suggested by James Curl¹.

How Mackintosh came to get this commission is not certain. David Walker speculates that he might have had friends or relatives living in Perthshire² and I have even heard it suggested that Beatrix Potter once stayed in Comrie and that Mackintosh might have visited her there. I have been unable to find any evidence to confirm that Mackintosh ever visited Comrie. A rumour, well-known in Comrie, has it that Peter Macpherson was introduced to Mackintosh in a pub and, after having been bought drinks, Mackintosh agreed to design a new building to replace the one which was destroyed in the fire. However, the most likely explanation would appear that the Brough family, the family of Peter Macpherson's former partner, were art lovers and, as a result, spent much time in Glasgow. It was possibly through them that Peter Macpherson was introduced to Mackintosh. All the same it must be remembered that Mackintosh was a partner by this time in the firm Honeyman, Keppie & Mackintosh and that the commission may have been obtained by the firm, possibly by one of the other partners, rather than by Mackintosh personally.

¹ Curl, James Stevens, '*Comrie*' *Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society Newsletter*, no 5, (Autumn 1974)

² Walker, David, '*Charles Rennie Mackintosh*' *The architectural Review* vol. 144 (Nov 1968)

At this point it is worth noting how this commission fitted into Mackintosh's architectural career. The main event in 1903 must have been the design and construction of the Willow tearooms in Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow for Miss Cranston. The site had been acquired by Miss Cranston in 1901 and Mackintosh was involved in the design from the outset right through until completion in October, 1904. Mackintosh was deeply involved working for Miss Cranston during this period and it was also during 1903 that he began to carry out alterations for her and her husband at their house, Hous' hill in Nitshill, Glasgow. In 1904, apart from being involved with the completion of the Willow Tearooms, his main project must have been the design of Scotland Street School. In the direction of Comrie, a small commission he undertook that year was the design of church furniture for the Holy Trinity Church in Bridge of Allan.

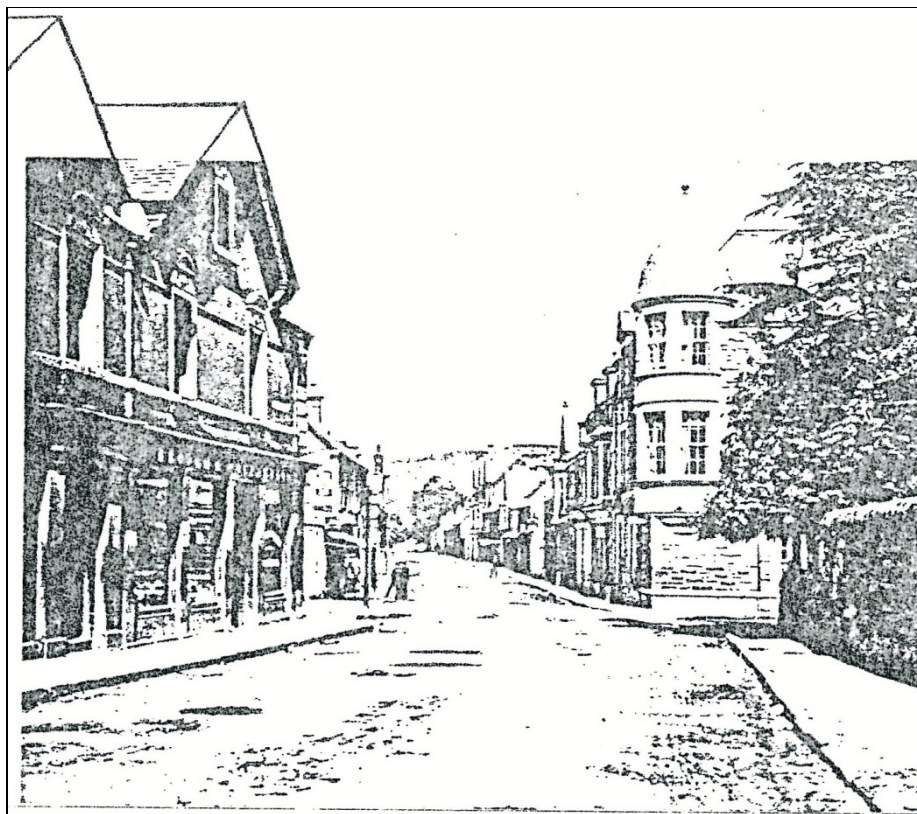
Looking back, over a wider period, the Comrie commission came after the completion of the first phase of the Glasgow School of Art (1899), Queen's Cross Church (1899), and his two main private house commissions, Windyhill in Kilmacolm (1901) and Hill House, Helensburgh (1903). Yet to come was the second phase of the Glasgow School of Art (design commenced 1906, building completed 1909) and it is here that we see a terrific blossoming of his style as demonstrated by one of the jewels of his career - the library and western facade. The Comrie commission was certainly carried out during the height of Mackintosh's architectural career; the first evidence of his decline did not appear until 1906, but it was not until 1909 that it gathered momentum and was unable to be halted.

Historic Photographs



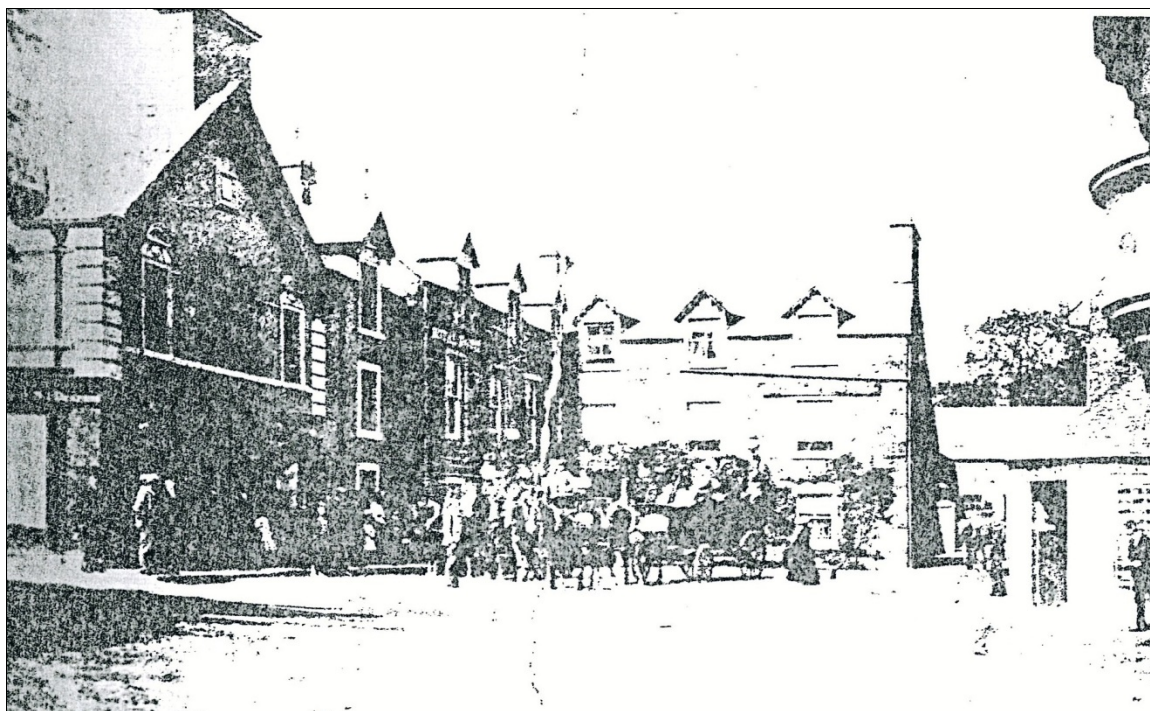
(1.1(a)) View from Dunira Street taken around 1860 (above).
(1.1(b)) View of Melville Square from the old bridge (below).





(1.2(a)) View from Dunira Street taken around 1900 featuring the refaced Victorian Building (above).

(1.2(b)) View of Melville Square with the Crieff / St Fillans coach (below).

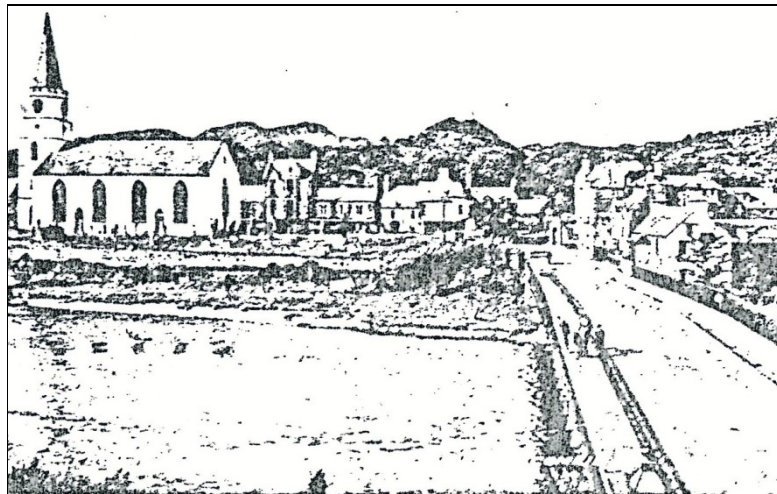




(1.2(c)) Detail of shopfront.



(1.3(a)) Early photograph of building (above).
(1.3(b)) General view from across the river Earn (below).



The Building

In this commission, Mackintosh did not disappoint us by departing from his usual approach. He created a building of his own brand, modelled on the Scottish vernacular tradition which had played a considerable part in many of his earlier works. However, as this was a relatively small commission within a rural village setting, he was unable to demonstrate, to a high degree, the monumental and stern character of many of his larger buildings. Although the appearance of the building is unique in Comrie, it contributes much variety to the appearance and character of the village. As I mentioned earlier, Comrie and its buildings underwent a significant change towards the end of the 19th century; the early small-scale domestic architecture was replaced, to a large extent by large-scale Victorian buildings which contribute, even today, to the character of the village. In spite of this fashion, Mackintosh designed this building in the usual manner, to a scale, sufficiently large, to enable it to compete satisfactorily with the Victorian buildings, and its individual character and lack of formality give it his personal stamp.

For a building of this nature and size, it abounds with Mackintosh features. Externally, the harling walls with harled reveals and sills; the small-paned windows of various sizes, but always with a vertical emphasis; the high, steep-pitched slate roof with tall, slender, tapering chimney; and the well-constructed but unique panelled doors all give the building the character which one has come to expect from Mackintosh. In addition, he has included two very unusual features. The first of these is the corner turret which lacks the vertical emphasis one might have expected and, instead, appears to be forced down on the building by the dominant, steep-pitched roof. This feeling is accentuated by the fact that

the turret cuts across the corner of the building; the corbel of either facade becomes inverted at the corner. This is a very unusual treatment which reduces the importance of the turret on the corner. Although the corner of the building at the entrance to the square is emphasized, the building as a whole takes precedence and overrides the corner statement. An interesting effect achieved as a result of the lack of harmony between the treatment of the corner on the ground and first floor of this particular design is the variation in the appearance of the turret when viewed under different conditions. For most of the time, the semi-circular turret appears as a complete unit, dominant in comparison to the inverted corbel and sharp corner below. At other times, however, the effect is totally different; each face of the building appears as if it has one individual corbelled bow-window, the centre window of the turret appearing detached from the other two and strongly associated with the sharp point of the corner immediately below. The main reason for this effect is that under certain conditions, a shadow is cast on the underside of the two corbels which serves to emphasize the overhang and this is in complete contrast to the very bright appearance of the inverted corbel on the corner.

An interesting point in relation to the corner turret is the following comment by Alison Harris:

'The turret is a powerful landmark in Comrie and was apparently built in response to a similar one on a nearby existing building, which was unfortunately demolished not long after Mackintosh's was built.'

I have been unable to find any evidence of such a building; the only building with a turret which was situated nearby appears to be the three-storeyed building diagonally opposite Brough & Macpherson's with its tall, two-storeyed turret and

domed roof. This building was standing prior to the fire in 1903 but is still standing today.

Externally, the second unusual feature is the two 'blind' dormers or gablets which rise above the eaves level of the smaller section of the building, directly above the window openings. Although this section of the building is original, Mackintosh added these dormers to the roof as an aesthetic feature to increase the vertical emphasis of the lower section of the building and at the same time to help relate it to the larger and more massive part which he designed. They rise from the attic floor level and are of insufficient height to have ever served any practical purpose. If viewed from a purely practical of view, they would surely have been omitted. Mackintosh surmounted these dormers with distinctive tapering stone skewes, a personal hallmark to the elevation.

The only other external feature which requires a mention is that of the shopfront itself. The shopfront is very simply and well-constructed in good-quality teak and is typically Mackintosh, especially in the detailing of the mullions, the doors and the panelled soffit over the entrance. There are, however, three factors which detract from the overall appearance and are certainly not typical. These are:

- i. The very light appearance of the woodwork. Examination of the early photograph (1.3(a)) shows that the woodwork was, in fact, stained dark at that time, and the present appearance is probably not as Mackintosh had intended.
- ii. The wrought iron entrance gates. These are certainly not Mackintosh features being far too detailed and over-played, yet they appear in the same early photograph. They must either have been replacements for

original gates or else new additions many years ago, the original shop having no outer barrier.

- iii. The traditional hand-painted lettering shows none of Mackintosh's influence. There are two possible explanations: the shop was either erected with a name board graced with Mackintosh lettering which was later changed to the present style; or Peter Macpherson must have insisted from the outset that he was having traditional lettering of the day and Mackintosh had to give in to his demand. From stories told in and around Comrie, it appears that Peter Macpherson was a very strong willed and forceful character and, if he had not agreed with any of Mackintosh's proposals, he would certainly have insisted that they be changed. As he was handing out the money for the building, he would have made sure that he had his way.

Whilst examining photograph (1.3(a)) there are a couple of additional points worth noting with regard to the shopfront and facade. The first is to note the sun blinds which are shown in the photograph, fitted over the shopfront. They are included Job Books of Honeyman & Keppie but have since been removed from the building. The second point is that at the time the photograph was taken, the building had not been white-washed, but had a natural harled finish. Today, the harling has been white-washed and finished at base level with a painted black band to the shop-window sill height. Although practical, this destroys the unity of the facade and the appearance of the shopfront; compare the appearance of the building today with that shown in the photograph. The appearance of the building would be greatly improved by continuing the white-wash down to ground level.

Moving inside, the first thing that strikes you when surveying the interior is how off-square and angular is the plan of what appeared, at first glance, to be a very simple and conventional building. This effect is followed throughout the main section; the original part accommodating the solicitors' offices and common stair being unaffected in this manner. This twisted plan is not as a result of a wild notion of Mackintosh but is due instead to the shape of the site and the location of the existing structure which was retained and included in the construction of this building.

The whole ground floor area of the reconstructed part of the building is given over to the shop and is entirely free of any obstructions, apart from four structural columns which have been incorporated into the U-shaped counter. Mackintosh formed an office at the rear of the shop by erecting an open-topped glazed screen which rises to the same height as the shelving units round all the perimeter walls. The screen, the shelving units and the counter have all been designed to suit one another; the general appearance of all the fittings is of unity. The shop appears much larger inside than is expected from the external appearance of the shopfront, due mainly to its substantial depth, and this spacious quality is accentuated by the high ceiling and large public area enclosed by the counter. A satisfying atmosphere prevails inside due to the spaciousness and the traditional style of the shop, whilst the comprehensive range of goods stocked adds another dimension to the visit. The shop has been preserved almost entirely as it was designed all these years ago, the Mackintosh features still surviving as listed below:

- i. The screen and perimeter wall shelving units with identical curved cappings as mentioned above.
- ii. All internal doors with their tall vertical panels and small glazed top panels (Drawing: Detail No. 2).

- iii. The large U-shaped counter with its simply panelled front and single motif carved out of each vertical timber facing (Drawing: Detail No. 3).
- iv. Sliding glazed inner screens to all the display windows which are subdivided into medium-sized square panes of glass.
- v. Timber panelling to the window reveals with relatively broad, but vertical panels giving the basic stern Mackintosh appearance.
- vi. The main entrance doors which, due to the large upper glazed panes, are not as elegant as they might have otherwise appeared. The harmony, which is apparent in so many of the details and fittings throughout the shop, is not found to the same extent in these doors (photograph 2.6) (Drawing: Detail No. 1).

Although the plan shows the shop to be considerably 'twisted' this is not immediately noticeable from within, due to the amount of goods stocked and the number of detailed features which divert ones attention away from the basic building shell. There is a small store off the shop, situated under the stairs, but the bulk of storage space is provided through the back in a two-storeyed stone lean-to building to the rear of the Royal Hotel. A separate small stone-built store is situated beyond this store with external access. Both these buildings are very old, dating back to before Mackintosh's time.

Adjacent to the shop in Dunira Street is a single, panelled door designed by Mackintosh (Drawing: Detail No. 4). Behind this door, on the left; is the entrance to the solicitors' ground floor public office whilst, straight ahead, the stair rises a full flight to the first floor landing and solicitors' upper offices. Turning right on the landing, a further four steps lead to the flat entrance door (Drawing: Detail No. 5), the flat being situated at a higher level over the shop. The stairwell is rather gloomy; the main source of daylight is a single roof light situated over the

landing, the light directed by means of a stack from roof to ceiling level. The secluded atmosphere created in the stairwell is in pleasant contrast to the bustling village main street below.

On entering the flat, one finds oneself in a spacious hall off which all the rooms are situated: the living room with a feature bay window situated at one corner (this is the corner turret of the building as discussed previously) and a very elegant timber fireplace with two-tier mantelpiece; the kitchen/dining room; two bedrooms, one with a basic Mackintosh fireplace; a generous bathroom; and an additional study/bedroom situated in the roof space over the solicitors' offices.

The jewel of the flat is undoubtedly the living room. The entrance to the room is at one corner and situated diagonally opposite is the semi-circular bay comprising of three vertical windows through which all daylight enters the living room. As a result, this corner is very bright, although the wall area within the bay itself is surprisingly large over the area of glass. Therefore, although light and airy, the room at this corner still feels contained by the enclosing walls and the division between the internal and external environments is strong. This comes as rather a surprise for when one looks at the turret from the outside one would expect this section of the room to open out and relate strongly to the village outside.

Externally, the steep-pitched roof over the building generally appears to push down on the turret whilst, more importantly, the shopfront and corbels push up from below, almost to sill height, making it appear as if the three windows rise from the base of the turret. Internally, however, the sill is at standard height above floor level and as the ceiling does not change in any way to emphasize the bay, the appearance is of a simple cluster of three narrow windows within a circular bay, the windows being fairly narrow and of traditional character. As if almost to strengthen the traditional character of the building, one odd feature of

the bay is that the two butts between the windows are noticeably of unequal width. This appears very strange in what is such an important feature within the room and it is almost as if the building has been designed to appear much older and less refined than it actually is. One interesting feature of the windows themselves is the deep internal sills which prove to be very practical. Indeed, all the windows in the main section of the flat have this feature.

The overall form of the window openings is very traditional, but Mackintosh has added these wide sills and, at the same time, omitted the traditional timber panelling to the reveals; the plaster finish of the walls is carried into the opening to meet the window frames.

Adjacent to the bay is the fireplace, a very elegant dark green-black stained timber unit with double mantelpiece (photograph 2.9) (Drawing: Detail No. 7). The lower mantelpiece is finely curved with a central carved motif and the rest of the fireplace is simply massed with concave-faced timber. The dark wood effectively sets off the rich red tiled surround in which the traditional cast iron grate is set. The colour and style of the fireplace is most exquisite although I agree with Mr John Smith that its location within the room is far from ideal. It is squeezed onto an external wall between the corner of the room and the beginning of the bay and, very curiously, overshoots the bay by some three inches which could easily have been absorbed at the other end. Whether Mackintosh planned the layout of the room or had requirements imposed by Peter Macpherson which meant that the fireplace had to be located in this position is unknown, but certainly from the point of view of flexibility the fireplace would have been better situated on the other external wall. This end of the room, away from the bay, is gloomy and enclosed, and the fireplace would have provided a good focal point in the centre of this wall around which people could have comfortably sat. This

would have been cosier during the cold winter evenings whilst the area around the bay would have been used to full advantage during the spring and summer months. The elevational treatment of the building would have been affected. The present single tall tapering chimney is a very bold feature and serves two fireplaces (a more economical solution), the other situated in the adjoining bedroom, side by side with the present living room fireplace.

The other Mackintosh features within the flat are:

- i. the internal doors with their concave architraves (Drawing : Detail No. 6);
- ii. and a more basic fireplace, situated in the master bedroom, of painted timber with a repeated carved motif, inverted but otherwise identical to that of the shop counter (Drawing: Detail No. 8).

All the accommodation within the flat is reasonably spacious and this is especially true of the study/bedroom situated in the roof space within the original section of the building. The ceiling here is low and restricted access is by means of a hatch approximately 2 ½ feet wide x 3 feet high situated in the hall almost 7 feet above floor level. The Smiths have had a narrow timber stair and landing constructed to ease the problem; prior to this, access was by ladder. In view of this, it is a likely assumption that the room and dormer window were constructed at a later date and were not part of Mackintosh's original design. There is another smaller hatch in the room which provides access to the roof space. From here one can see clearly where the original roof structure, which was saved from the fire, stops and the more recent structure over the main section of the building begins; the new structure begins at the first rafter immediately east of the study/bedroom.

Above the flat, in the roof space over the main section of the building, are two tailors' workrooms and WC. Access to these rooms was originally by means of an external stair which climbed up the gable to the entrance door but which, unfortunately, no longer exists. Access is obviously very difficult now without the stair and these premises have, therefore, been lying unused for some considerable time (although it is now possible to crawl through the roof space from the flat and gain access to the workrooms through a hole which has recently been knocked in one of the walls). Each room is brightly lit by a pair of large glazed skylights which make these premises ideal as workrooms. The standard of finish was generally high, and even the internal doors are similar to those used throughout in the flat below, although they are slightly thinner and have plainer architraves (photograph 2.10) (Drawing: Detail No 11). The flooring and plasterwork are now in poor condition, and extensive renovation work would have to be carried out and access provided before these premises could ever be re-occupied.

The two-storeyed solicitors' offices, which comprise of one large office and WC on the ground floor, with two offices and a safe on the upper floor, are contained entirely within the original section of the building, although the WC and safe are accommodated in a small two-storey rear extension which was probably added at a much later date. This section of the original building, although retained in its basic form, received much detailed treatment by Mackintosh to adapt it to the style of the new building. Externally, these changes included harling over the smooth stone facing; constructing the small 'blind' dormers; fitting a new entrance door; and fitting small-paned sash windows to the upper floor. Before mentioning the internal features it must be remembered that at the time of the fire Mr Mitchell, the solicitor, occupied only the ground floor accommodation, the two rooms on the first floor were occupied by Brough & Macpherson. The ground

floor office internally shows no sign of any treatment by Mackintosh. The first floor offices, however, have Mackintosh doors (Drawings: Detail Nos. 9&10); windows, with plastered reveals but without the deep sills found in the flat; and a basic fireplace in the rear office, which is identical to that in the bedroom of the flat (Drawing: Detail No.8). The fireplace in the front office is of traditional design and I suspect that the Mackintosh fireplace has, at one time, been removed. I can only assume that Peter Macpherson took the opportunity to renew these fittings at the time the new building was being erected to provide a uniform appearance throughout between the old and the new. I suppose that this would not have been necessary for the solicitor who was entirely accommodated within the ground floor premises although, surprisingly, even his entrance door at the foot of the common stair is the original one.

Current photographs



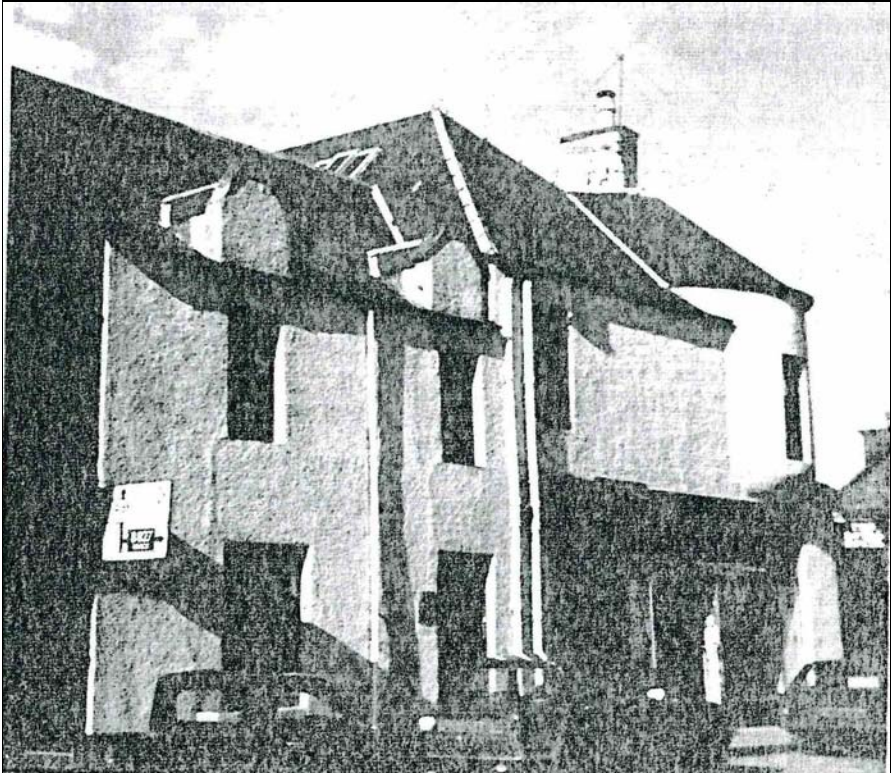
(2.1) General view from across the River Earn (above)

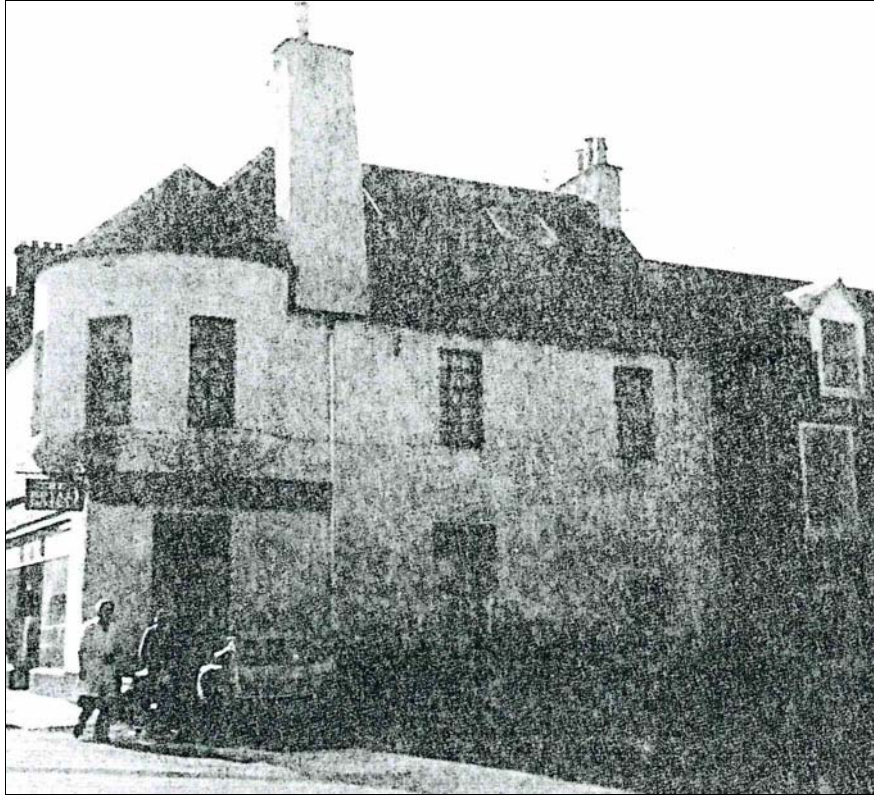
(2.2 General view of building (below)



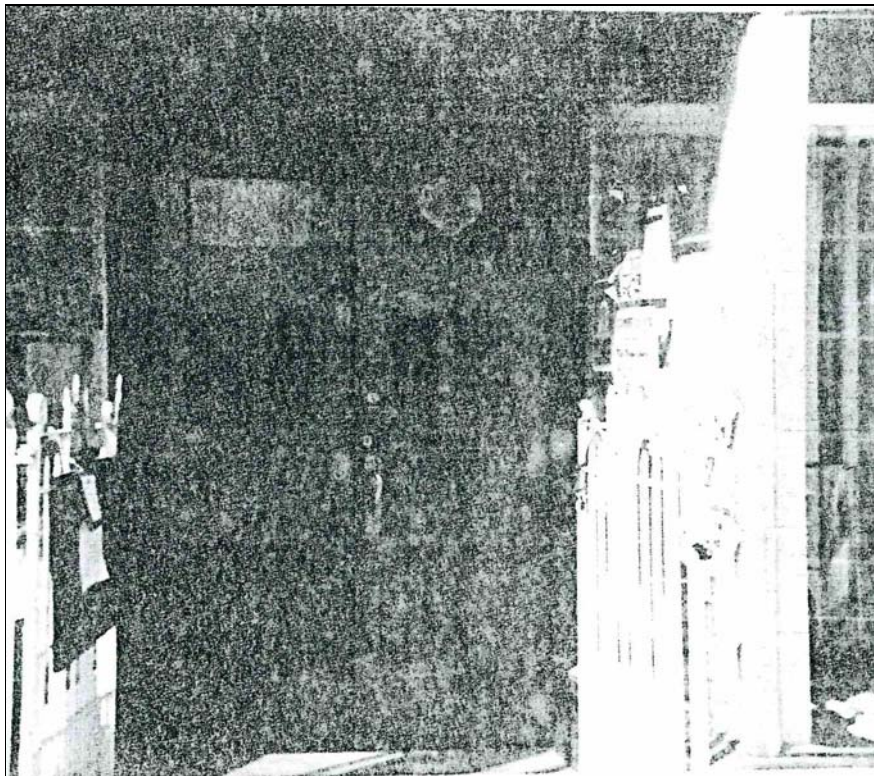


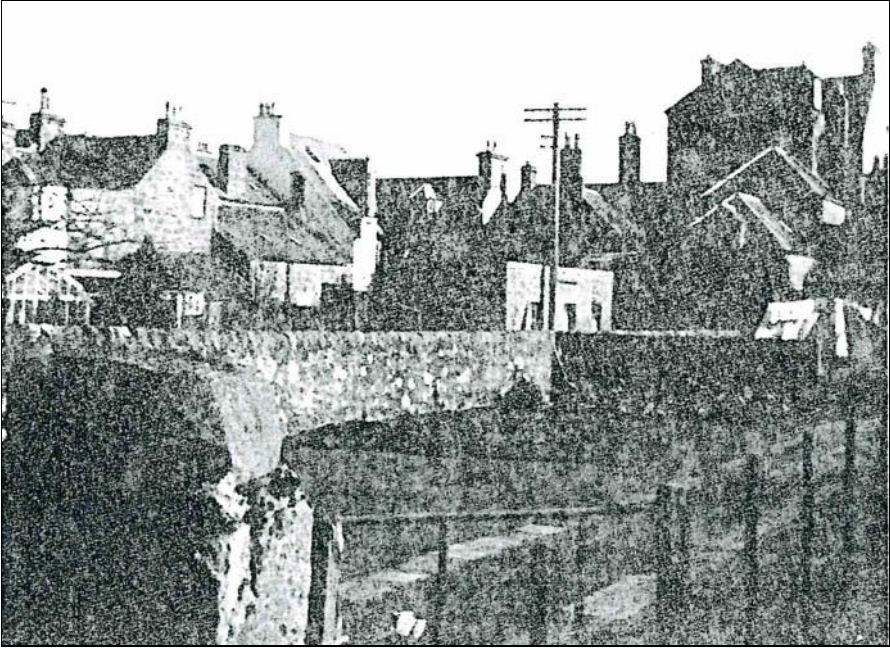
(2.3) View from Dunira Street (above)
(2.4) Dunira Street facade (below)





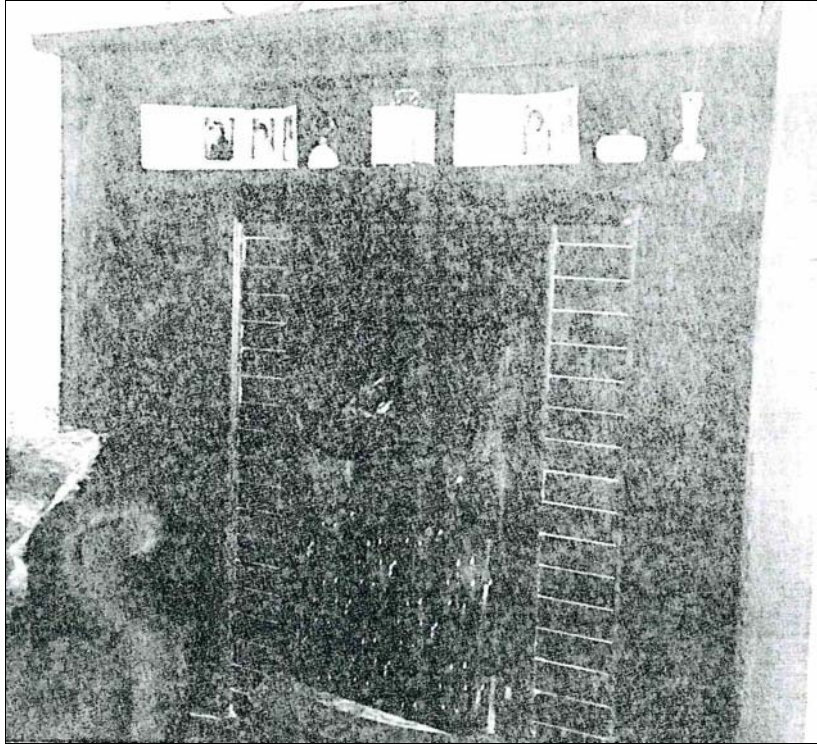
**(2.5) Melville Square façade (above)
(2.6) Shop entrance; close up (below)**





(2.7) Rear of building, general view (above)
(2.8) Rear of building, close up (below)





(2.9) Fireplace in the flat living room (above)
(2.10) Tailors' workrooms on second floor (below)



Future Prospects

The future prospects for the building, on the whole, look good. Although owned by three different people, joint maintenance and redecoration is carried out as required. The building is not listed in 'Category A', its architectural value is now fully realised. Substantial alterations would not now be allowed and the imposed restrictions should not affect the future of either the flat or the solicitors' property to any great extent. The solicitors' property should not be seriously affected internally as it is far from being a complete example of Mackintosh's work. As far as the flat is concerned, its value should increase as its architectural merit becomes fully appreciated and this should be an attraction to any future owner ensuring that it receives careful and sympathetic attention in the future.

Unfortunately, this is not the situation with regard to the shop. At present, the shop is substantially as it was when completed and it has been maintained in extremely good condition. For this we must thank the Macpherson family, including its present owner, Miss Norah Hamilton. The shop serves as a traditional draper's and ironmonger's and, in its present form, serves the people of Comrie well. Its future looks secure for as long as it is owned by Miss Hamilton but, if it ever comes on the market, the chances are that prospective purchasers, who might be interested in acquiring it, would want it as a going business concern and might be wary of the restrictions imposed due to its architectural value and 'Category A1 Listing. As a result, it might be difficult to find a new owner who is prepared to accept these restrictions which require, among other things, that the present layout and fittings in the shop are retained. There is then a danger that there might be no alternative but to permit internal alterations to be carried out and, if this were allowed to happen, we would lose what has been cherished by the Macpherson family for almost 80 years.

On the other side of the coin, however, is the situation with regard to the people of Comrie. Presently, they are well-served by the shop which makes a considerable contribution to the life of the village. If architectural criteria alone were to dominate the issue then it would seem likely that the shop might become a museum piece, possibly masquerading under the guise of a gallery or antique shop. If this were to happen, it would be the people of Comrie who would become the victims with the loss of yet another village shop.

Neither situation is desirable, and we can only hope that the shop will be able to continue in its present form for very many years to come.

Conclusion

This study illustrates an example of a small-scale Mackintosh building in a Scottish village setting. Mackintosh was successful in dealing with the restrictions imposed by both the site and those parts of the previous building which were retained after the fire. When one takes account of the fact that a disaster led to this commission and that Peter Macpherson, carrying on his business in temporary accommodation, must have been anxious for new premises, it is perhaps surprising that the building is so finely detailed and bears the stamp of Mackintosh's unique style.

Some questions still remain unanswered. For example:

- i. evidence to confirm how Mackintosh obtained this commission;
- ii. photographs showing the previous building after it was destroyed by fire and also during the construction of the new building. They would be invaluable in showing the extent of the fire and how much of the building was retained;
- iii. original drawings would show if the proposals differed from the completed building, especially with regard to the shopfront and lettering;
- iv. early photographs showing the building immediately after completion;
- v. information regarding the refacing of the earlier harled building.

In the future, further evidence may come to light to enable some of these questions to be answered, but at the moment no more information is available.

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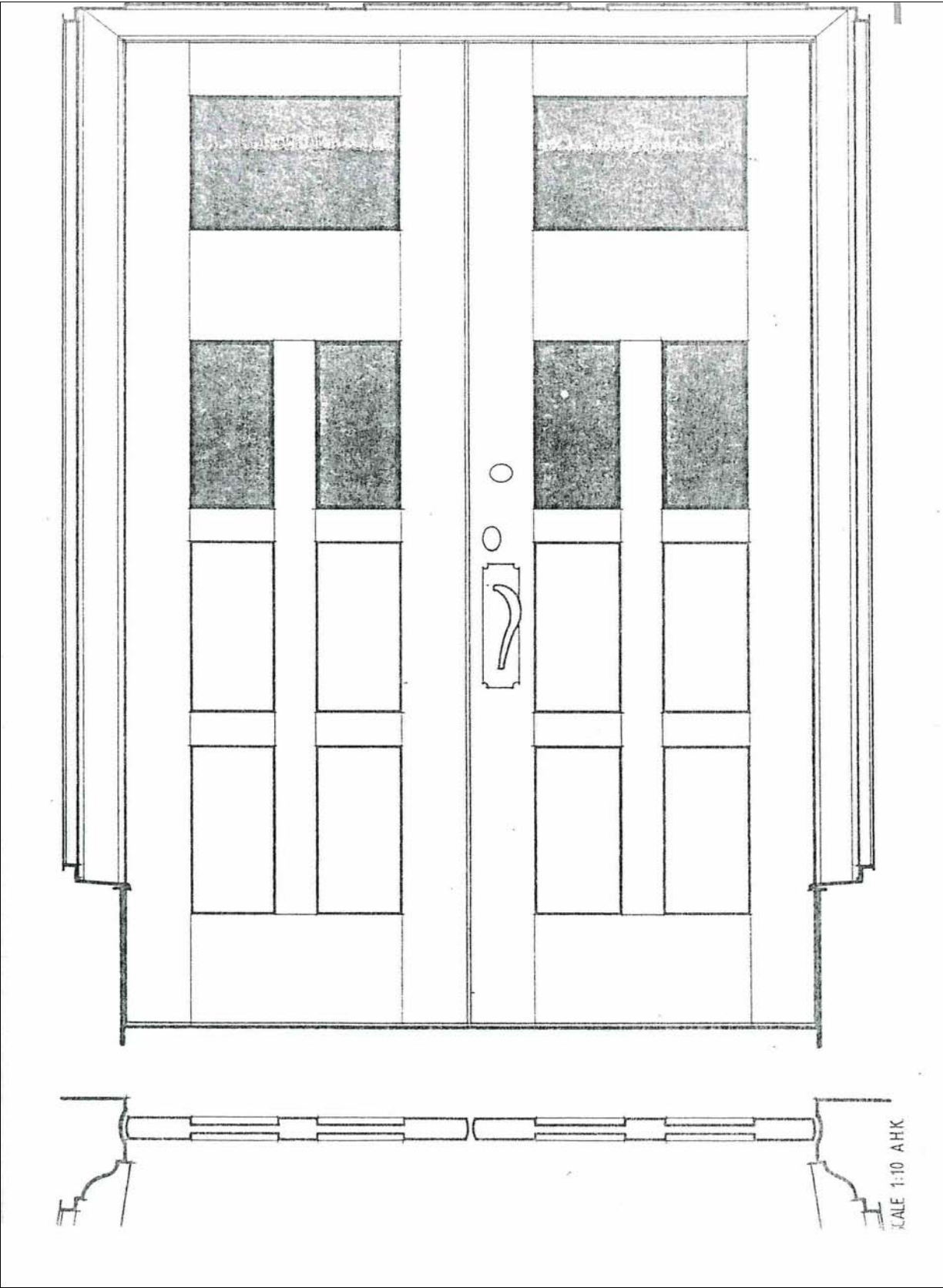
Walker, David, '*Charles Rennie Mackintosh*', *Architectural Review*, vol. 1447 (Nov. 1968), pp. 355 et seq.

This article was later included in the following book:

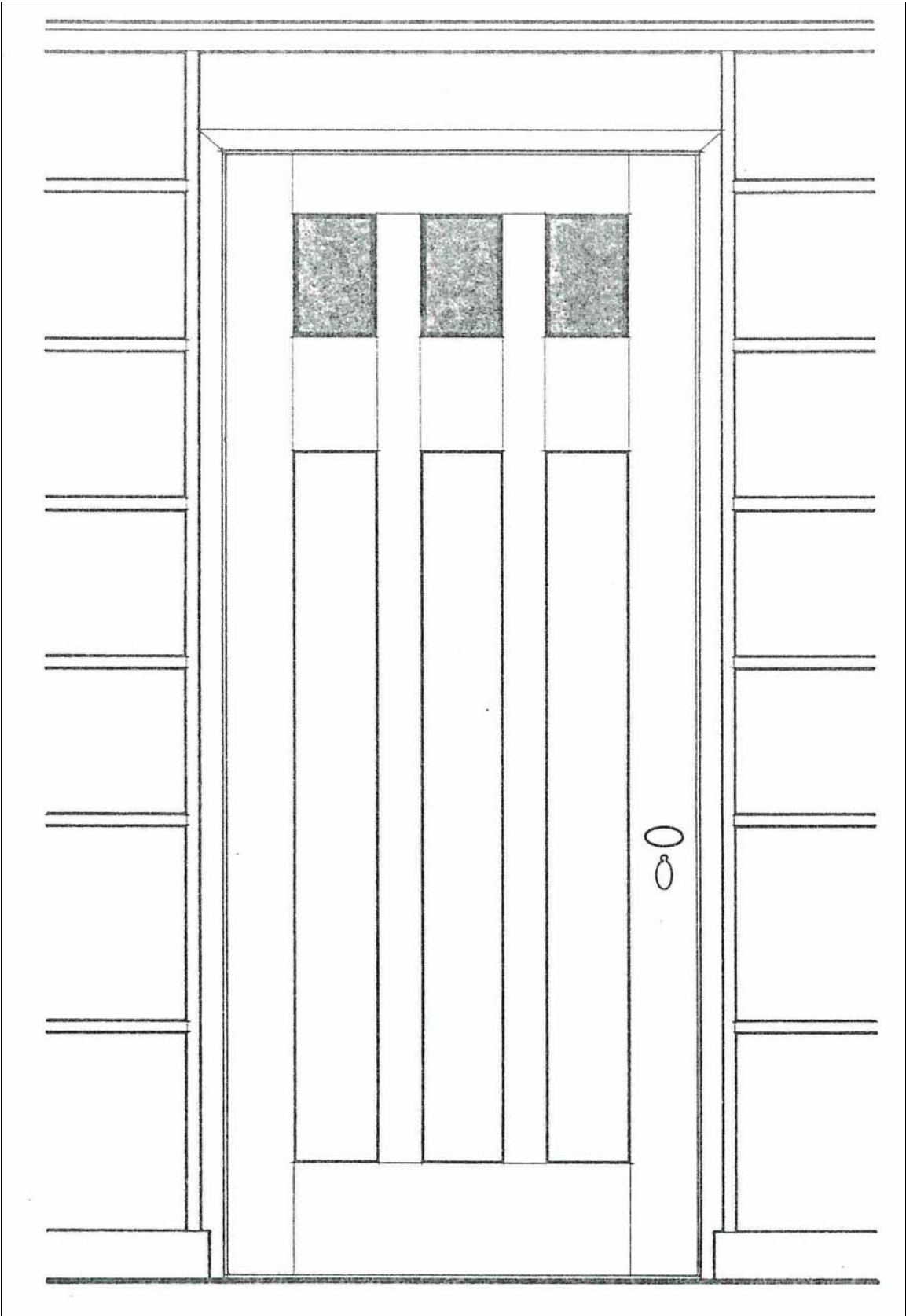
Richards, J. M. and Nikolaus Pevsner (editors), *The Anti-Rationalists*, (Architectural Press).

General

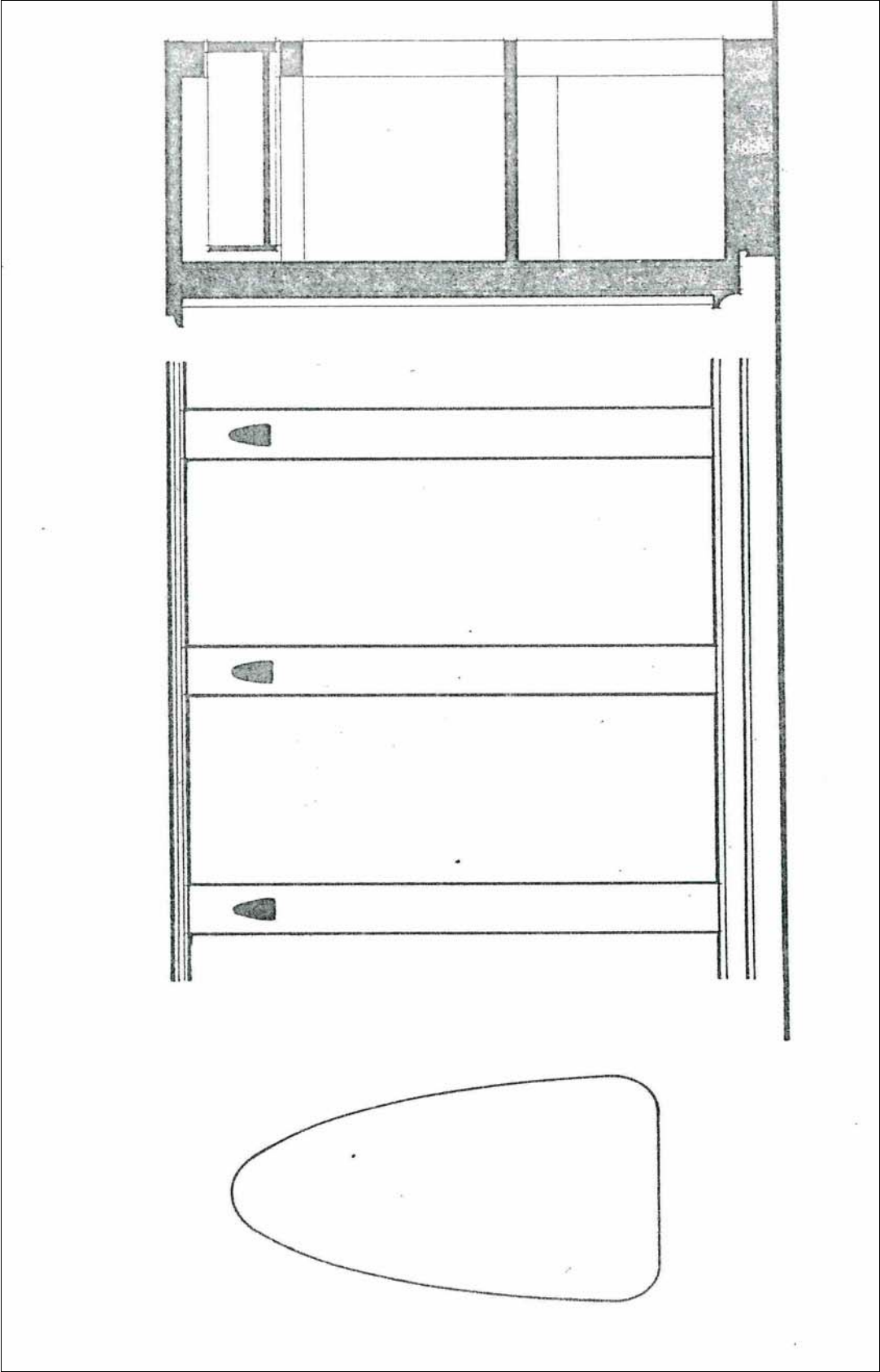
Howarth Thomas, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement* 2nd ed., (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1977).



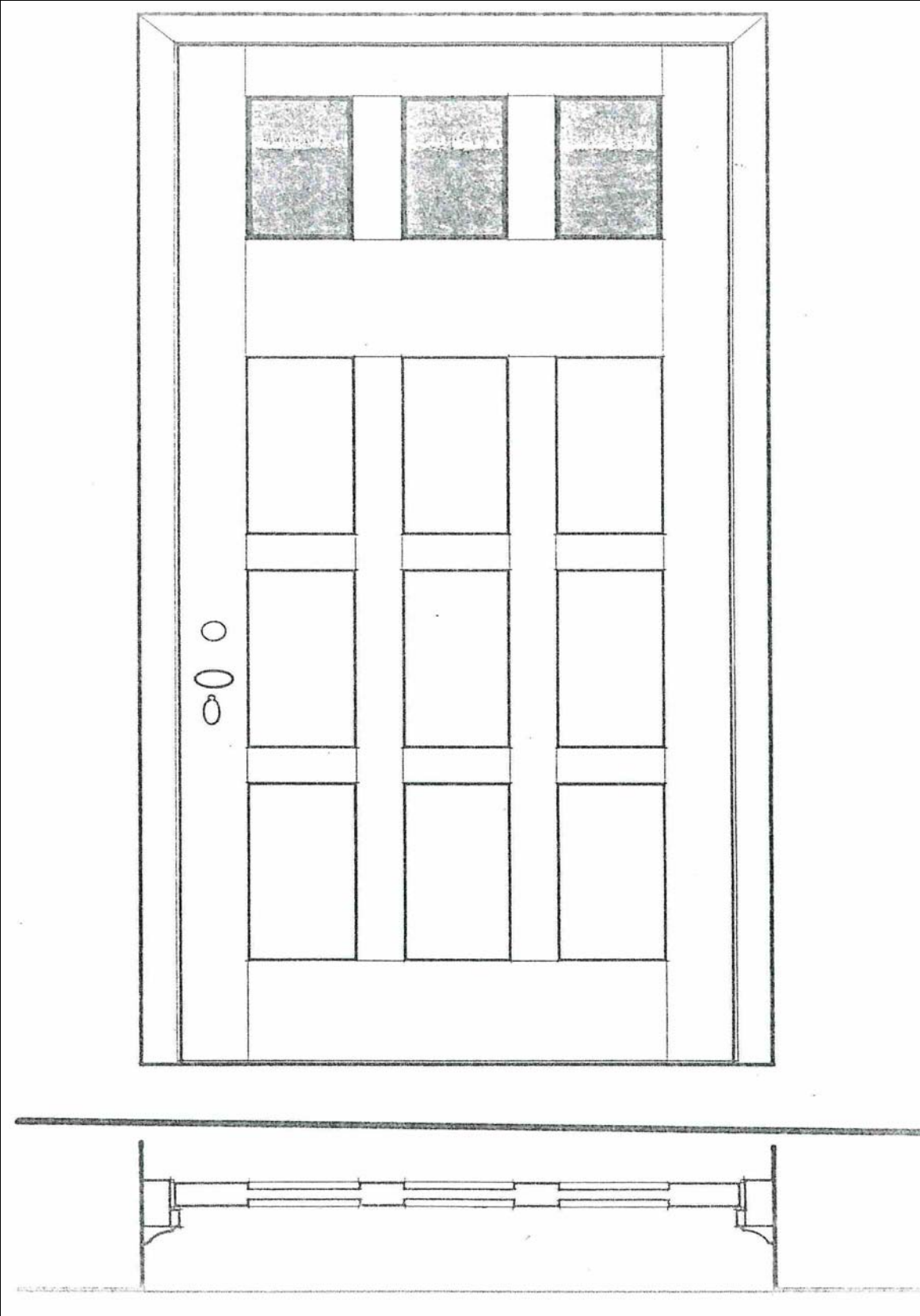
Drawing 1: Shop - Entrance Doors (plan and elevation)



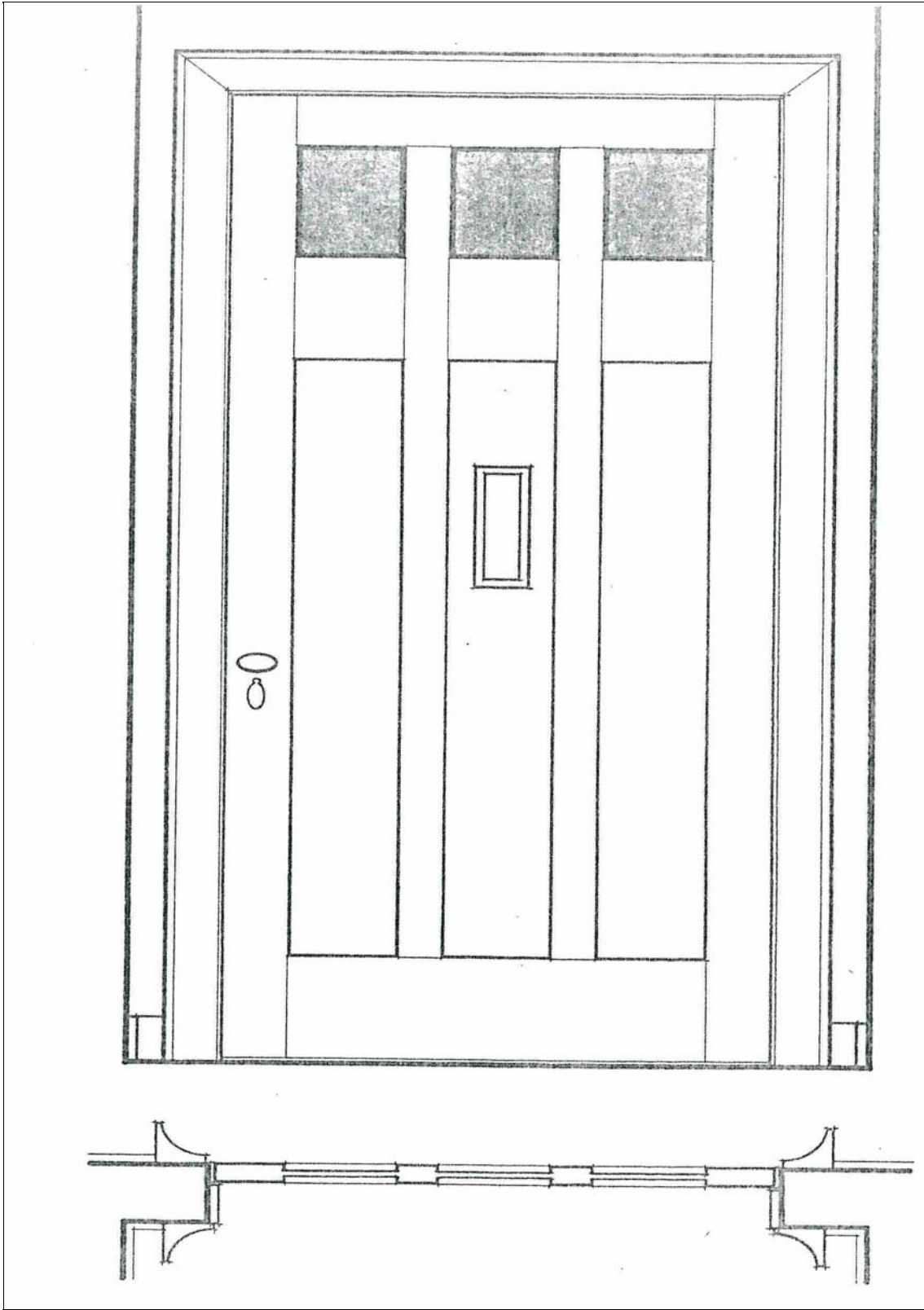
Drawing 2: Shop - Typical internal door (door to rear store) (elevation)



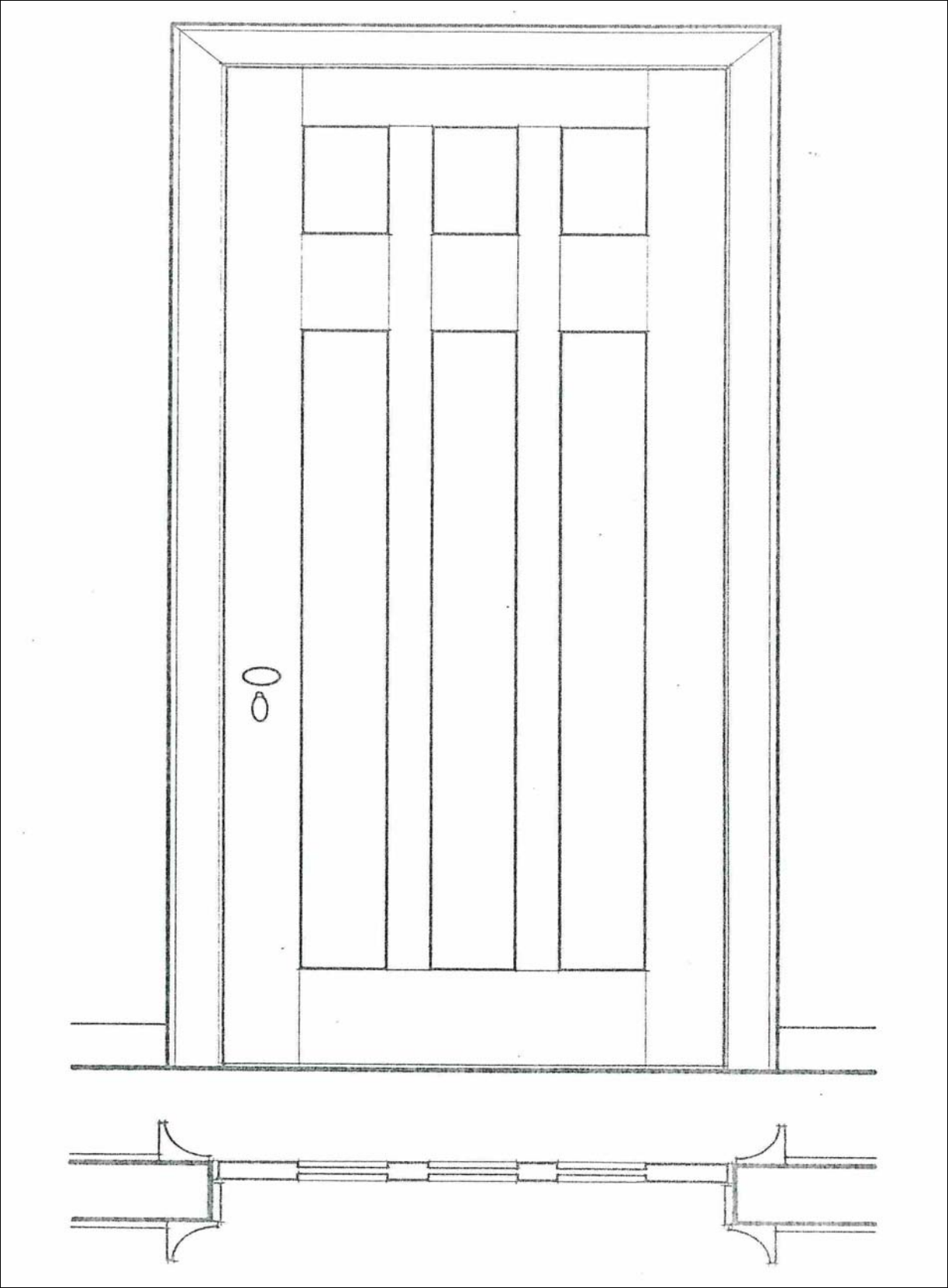
Drawing 3: Shop - Counter (elevation and section)



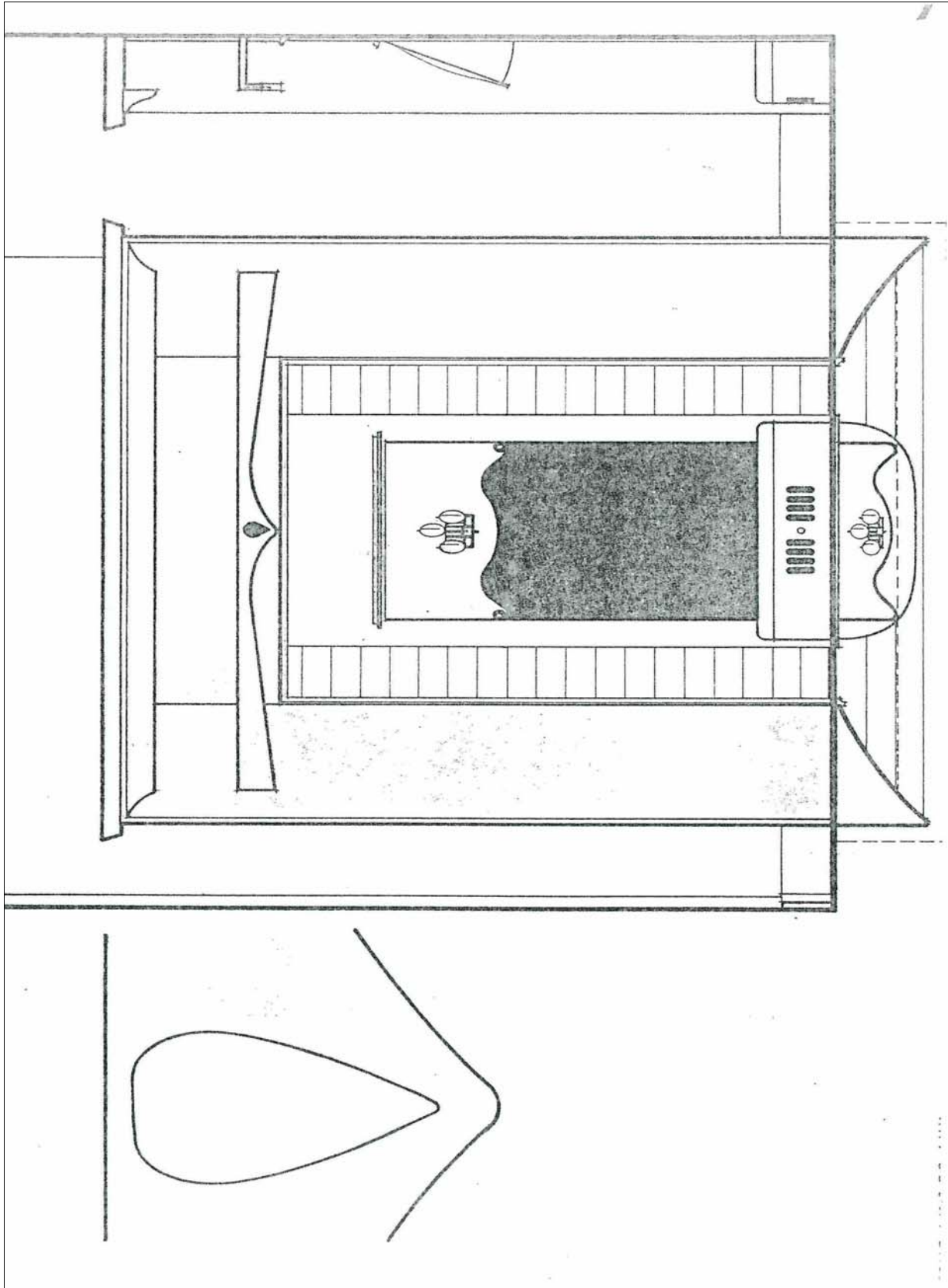
Drawing 4: Common stair – Entrance door (plan and elevation)



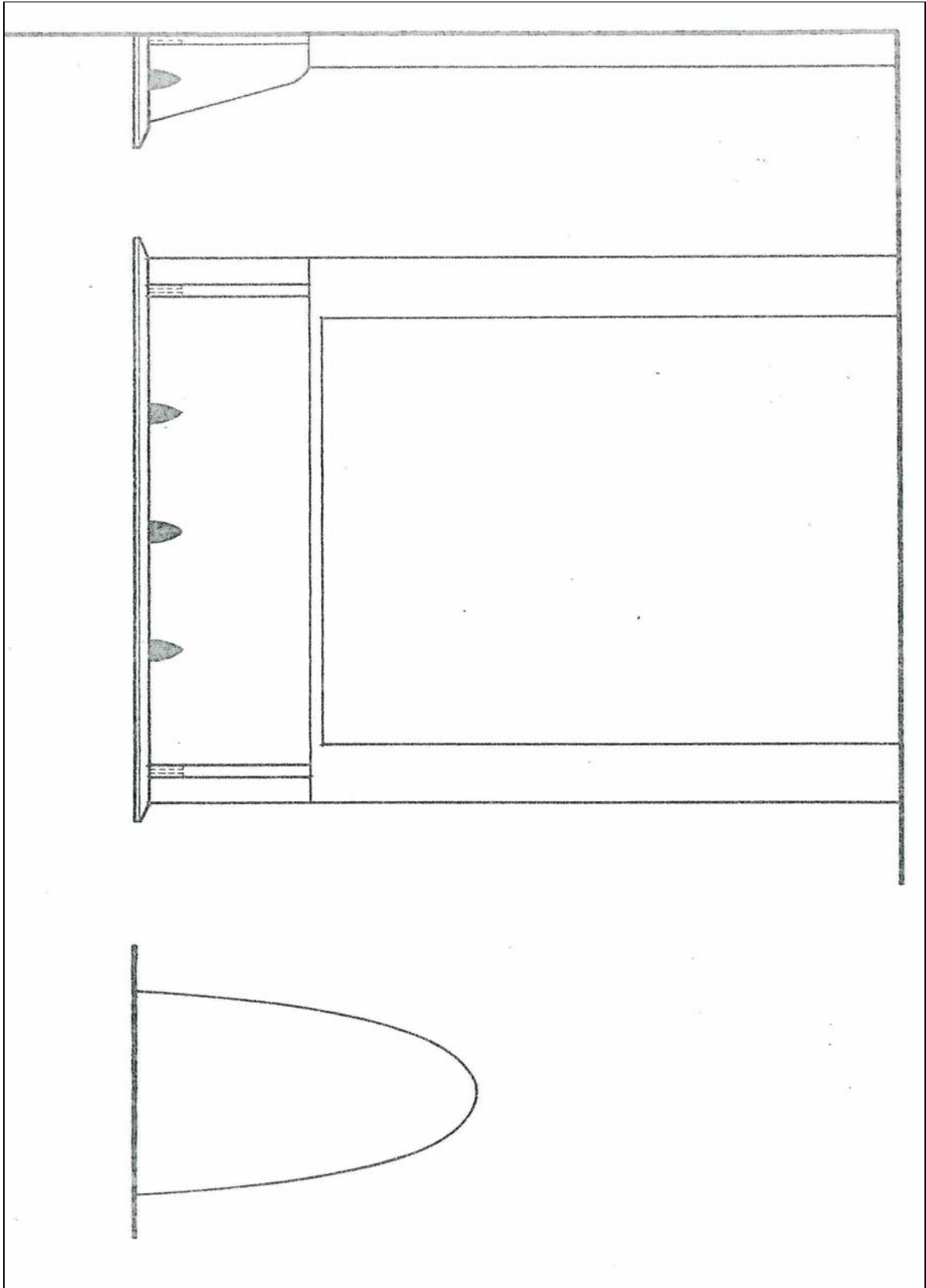
Drawing 5: Flat - Entrance door (plan and elevation)



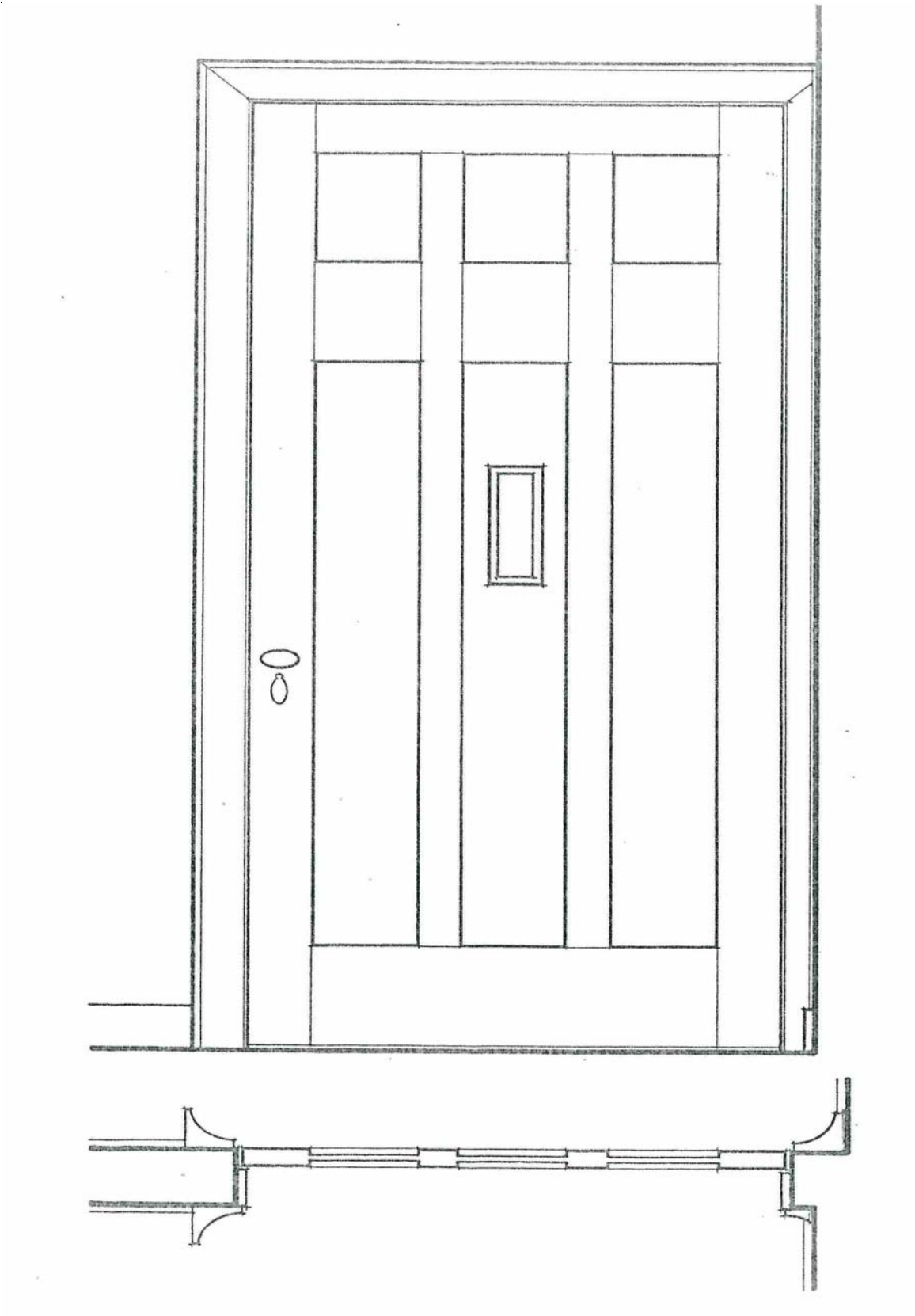
Drawing 6: Flat – Typical internal door (plan and elevation)



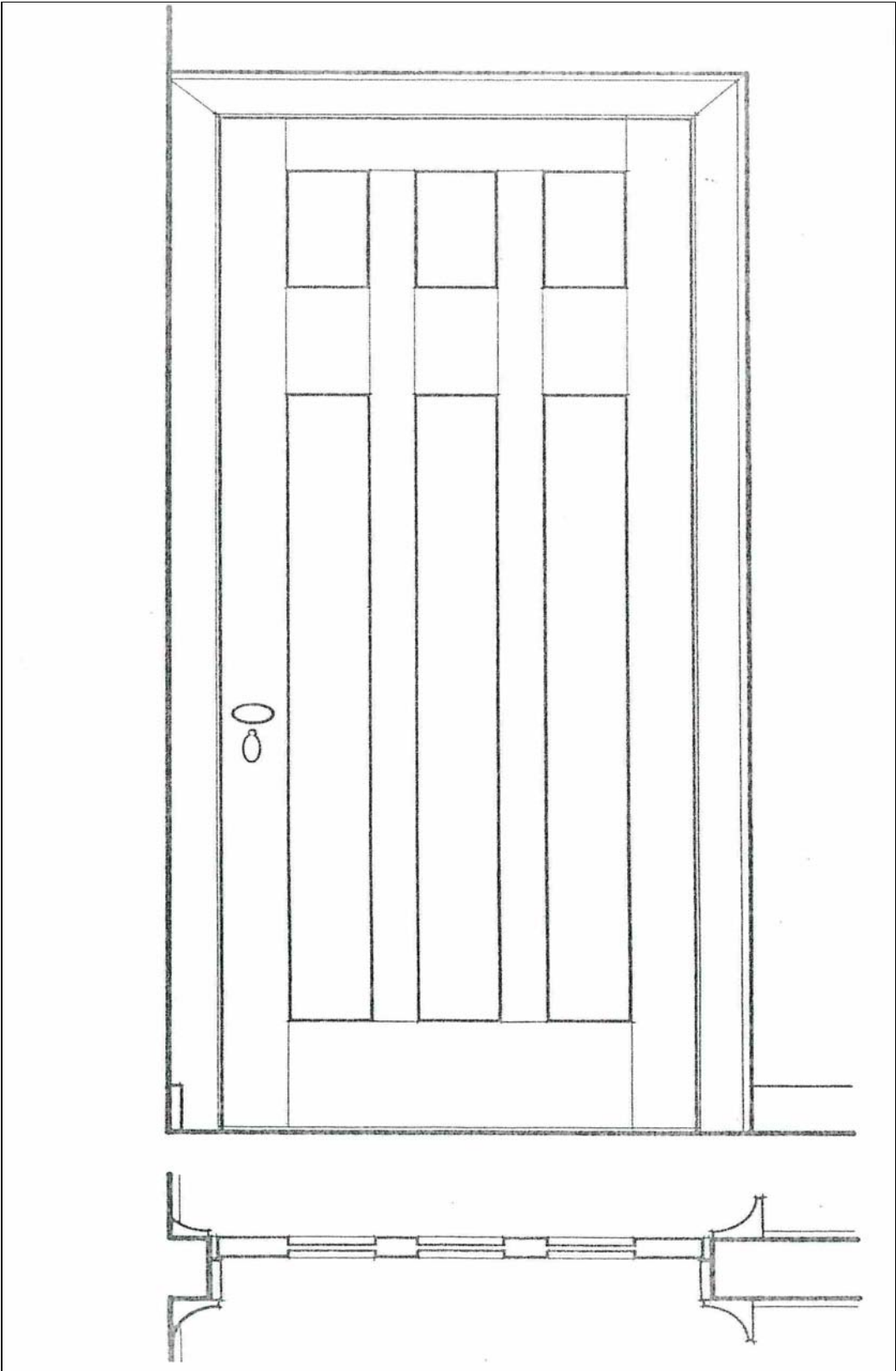
Drawing 7: Flat – Living room fireplace (Plan, elevation and section)



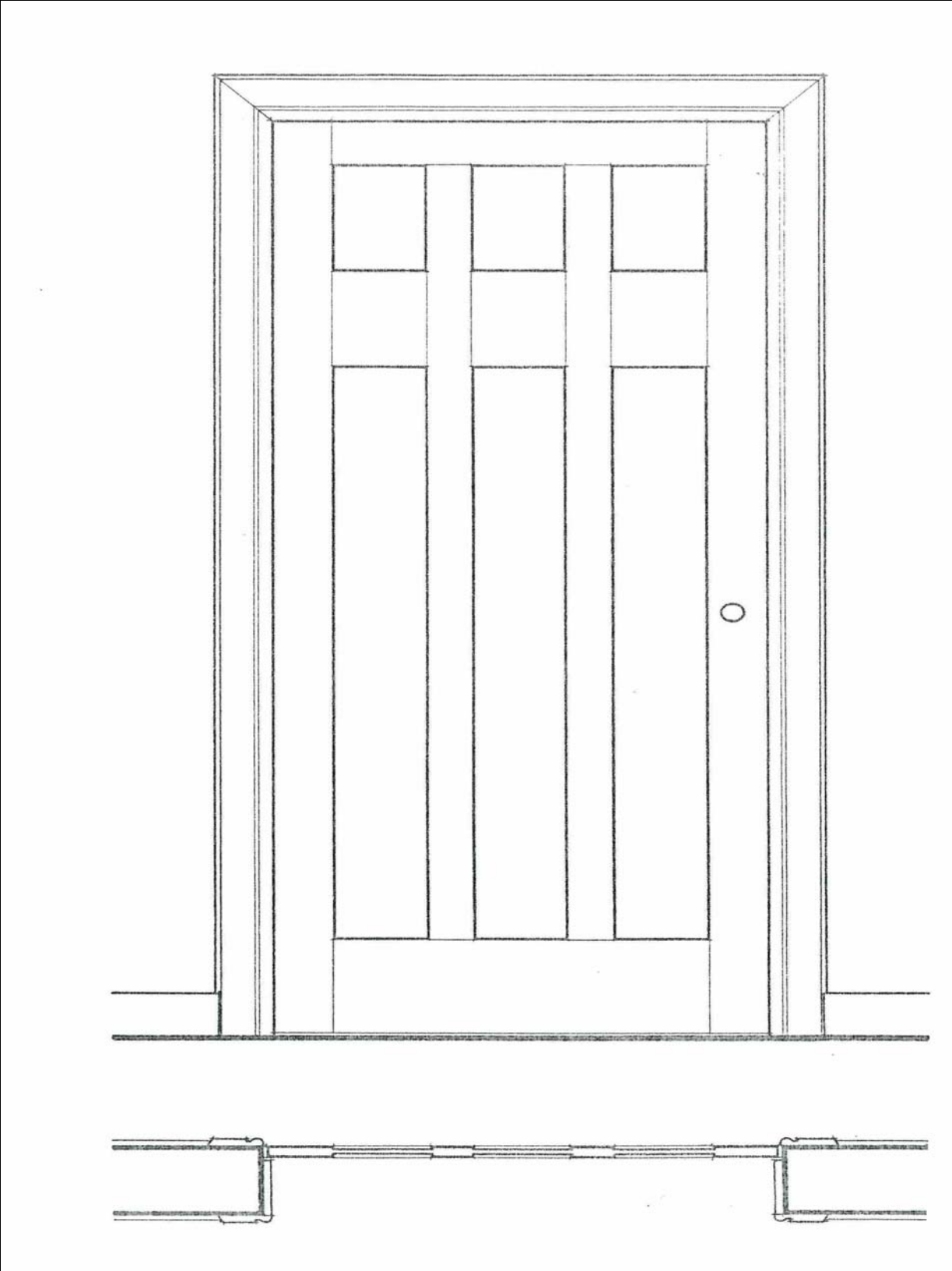
Drawing 8: Flat – Master bedroom fireplace, identical to fireplace in solicitor’s office; rear, first floor (elevation and section)



Drawing 9: Solicitor's Offices – First floor entrance door from common stair (plan and elevation)



Drawing 10: Solicitors' offices – Internal door to front office, first floor (plan and elevation)



Drawing 11: Tailors' workrooms – Internal doors (plan and elevation)



Comrie – Drummond Street and Dalginross bridge



The Mackintosh building pre-restoration



The outside of the shop





The inside of the shop



The out-buildings





The attic



The Mackintosh flat pre-Landmark in 1984



In the hall, the original doors had been painted white.



The sitting room



The sitting room

On the sitting room fireplace
and the inner side of the
door, the original dark green
stain survived.





In the kitchen, some original wallpaper and distemper was uncovered in the kitchen.

The bathroom had been undercoated many times





The bedrooms – an original fireplace had survived in the larger bedroom below.

