

## Mackintosh at the Willow: The Willow Tea Rooms

After our morning of lectures at The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland we took the short walk to 217 Sauchiehall Street to have lunch at the newly restored original Willow Tea Rooms, where we were warmly welcomed by Stewart Brown.

Mackintosh was commissioned to design the tea rooms by Kate Cranston and they opened in October 1903. Although Mackintosh had worked on three of Miss Cranston's tea rooms previously this was the only one where he designed the outside and the interiors including fixtures and fittings

Lunch was served in the back saloon on the ground floor where we sat on ladder-back chairs at black painted tables set with white linen cloths and blue willow pattern crockery, made especially by the Burleigh Pottery copying the original pattern.

The front saloon is painted white and decorated with gesso relief panels in an abstract organic pattern of white and green. It is well lit by a leaded panel window to the front and a large black metal baldacchino with lights in the canopy.

The Salon de Luxe, intended to be an extra special tea room (higher prices were charged!), is a Mackintosh *tour de force*. White entrance doors feature leaded glass decorations in green, purple, pink and white. The room is small, seating no more than thirty-six at silver painted tables and high back chairs upholstered in purple velvet. The white walls are inset with mirrors and leaded purple



The restored exterior showing the large bay window of the Salon de Luxe on the first floor, now back in its original recessed position. (Photo Peter Jefferies)



The front saloon furnished with ladder-back chairs. (Photo Peter Jefferies)



The Salon de Luxe showing the high-back metallic-finish chairs. Two chandeliers in pink, clear and peridot green glass reflect the colour scheme of the room. (Photo Peter Jefferies)

glass, above grey silk with occasional lines of small pearls. On one side wall is a copy of Margaret Macdonald's gesso panel *O ye, all ye that walk in Willowwood*. The original is now in Kelvingrove Museum. Two chandeliers light up the room, made of coloured globes and pendants of various sizes, the largest being about three inches in diameter. The whole Salon de Luxe is a coordinated vision in white, pink, purple, grey and silver and totally feminine.

The Billiard Room when it is finished will be the antithesis of the Salon de Luxe, with a black decor only relieved by mauve grey paint on the upper half of the walls and the white and navy-blue tiles of the fireplace.

We all agreed that The Willow Tea Room Trust have made an excellent job of restoring the original building and preserving it for the future.

*Maggie Jefferies*