

ALEXANDER GREEK THOMSON



ALEXANDER 'GREEK' THOMSON

is one of Scotland's finest and most original nineteenth-century architect / designers. Although he was highly regarded by his contemporaries, his work has remained in the shadow of his more famous counterpart, Charles Rennie Mackintosh.

Thomson's buildings exist largely in or around the centre of Glasgow - these include churches, warehouses, tenements, offices and mansions, and his contribution to the architecture of Victorian and Edwardian Glasgow is largely unsurpassed. The Egyptian Buildings still stand in Union Street as Thomson's finest surviving commercial work, a stunning example of his use of Greek, Roman and Egyptian influence.

His strict religious convictions lay at the root of his genius - he was inspired by biblical theology and the idea of the eternal which he saw in ancient art. His use of Classical Greek and Roman elements make his constructions instantly recognisable.

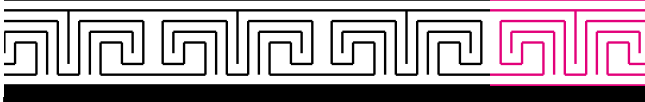
His architectural trademarks include stylised pineapples, geometric Greek fret patterns and scrolls, and though he is referred to as 'Greek' it could just as easily have been 'Indian' or 'Egyptian' - unusual for a man who never left the British Isles and rarely ventured outside his native Scotland.

Born in Balfour, Alexander Thomson was one of twenty children. He trained in Glasgow and eventually set up in business with his brother George.

During his career Thomson's work included designing villas for the new class of wealthy Glasgow business men. One such villa was Holmwood House, designed for mill owner John Couper. Thomson took responsibility not only for the architectural plans, but also the interior design of the villa, and even the solid furnishings and textiles. Every single detail was carefully planned, from chimney pots to wall friezes, and the house exists as a tribute to Thomson's talent, not only as an architect, but also as a designer in his own right.



Thomson's influence can be seen in buildings all over the world, especially in the USA, where many of his own apprentices emigrated. Although much of his work has suffered destruction and neglect enough still exists today to illustrate the work of one of the most innovative artists of the nineteenth century.





Holmwood House

Holmwood House is one of Alexander Thomson's finest and most complex houses. It was acquired by The National Trust for Scotland in 1994.

Holmwood was built for £3,700 in 1857-58 for James Couper, who owned the nearby paper mills at Millholm with his brother Robert. It is architecturally original and is perhaps Thomson's most remarkable domestic building. There is nothing at all conventional about the building. The facade consists of two gables, the left hand higher than the right, housing a decorated, curved bay window, whose glazing forms a screen behind stone columns. The obvious horizontal lines of the building, combined with the wide eaves and the low pitched gables gives the villa an exotic appearance. Every single detail has been carefully planned - from chimney pots to brackets, doors and gates.

The interior of the house is equally special

and we believe that Thomson was given free rein in its design. His aim was to make each room so perfect that it was a work of art in itself. The rooms were decorated by Glasgow decorator Campbell Tait Bowie to designs by Thomson. These were inspired by the art of the Ancient Greeks and in the dining room there is a wall frieze based on the illustrations of English artist John Flaxman, showing scenes from Homer's *Iliad*

Unfortunately the furnishings at Holmwood are lost but what remains on the walls is enough to convey what an inspired artist and architect Alexander Thomson was.

