

Thomson, Alexander 'Greek' 1817 - 1875



Alexander Thomson [commonly known as Alexander 'Greek' Thomson] was born in Balfron, Scotland on 9 April 1817. In c.1834 he began training as an architect in the office of Robert Foote in Glasgow. When, in 1836, Foote was forced to withdraw from architectural practice through ill health, Thomas transferred his articles to John Baird I (1798-1859) in Glasgow with whom he remained first as assistant and later as chief draughtsman for ten years

Thomson commenced practice as an architect in Glasgow in 1848 and that year formed a partnership with his brother-in-law John Baird II (1816-1892) as Baird & Thomson. The partnership was dissolved in 1857 and he formed a new partnership with his younger brother, George Thomson (1819-1878), A. & G. Thomson. The partnership was effectively dissolved in 1871 when George Thomson emigrated to the Cameroons to become a missionary. Thomson then went into partnership with Robert Turnbull (1839-1905) as A.G. Thomson & Turnbull.

Thomson began designing in the Greek Revival style early in his career and is with the neo-Greek idiom that his name has subsequently become associated. although he did not work exclusively in this style and there are neo-Egyptian influences in some of his buildings. His output was prodigious. The Dictionary of Scottish Architects 1660-1980 has identified over 200 architectural projects designed by or attributed to him, mainly in Glasgow and its suburbs. It included numerous villas and tenements, office buildings, churches, cemeteries, schools, shops and warehouses.

Thomson was actively involved in the Glasgow Architectural Society and the Glasgow Institute of Architects, and was President of both.

Throughout his career, he lived in Glasgow. He died at his home, 1 Moray Place, Strathbungo, Glasgow on 22 March 1875

Worked in

UK

Works

3-11 Dunlop Steeet, Glasgow (1849); The Knowe, Pollokshields (1853); Pollok Burgh School, Pollokshaws, Glasgow (1855); Caledonia Road Church, Glasgow (1856-58); Queen's Park Terrace, Eglinton Street, Glasgow (1856-60); St Vincent Street Church, Glasgow (1857-9); Chalmers Free Church, Glasgow (1859); Moray Place in Strathbungo, Glasgow (1859-61); the Cairney Building in Bath Street, Glasgow (1860-61); Bucks Head Building, Glasgow (1863); Queen's Park Church, Glasgow (1867-69); Great Western Terrace, Glasgow (1867-77); "Egyptian Halls" in Union Street, Glasgow (1870-72); and Blackie's Printing Works, Glasgow (1871). He also designed a number of monuments for the Glasgow Necropolis including the Beattie Monument (c.1867); and the Inglis Monument (c.1868)

See also:

[Dictionary of Scottish Architects 1660-1980](#)

[Historic Environment Scotland](#) - 297 entries on Alexander Thomson [Type Alexander Thomson in the search box]

Bibliography

Alexander "Greek" Thomson, architect 1817-1875 : an exhibition in appreciation of the work of Alexander "Greek" Thomson, on the occasion of the Festival of Architecture to celebrate the year of the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Royal Institute of British Architects. London : Architectural Association, 1984

Alexander Greek Thomson : the Glasgow building. Glasgow : City of Glasgow District Council Planning Department, 1990

Barclay, David. "Greek' Thomson: his life and opinions'. Architectural Review vol. 15, May 1904 pp. 182-194

Blomfield, Reginald. "Greek Thomson: a critical note'. Architectural Review vol. 15, May 1904 pp. 194-195

Budden, Lionel, 'The work of Alexander Thomson'. *The Builder* vol. 99, 3 December 1910 pp. 815-819

Crook, J. Mordaunt. *The Greek Revival*. London: John Murray, 1995

Directory of British Architects 1834-1914. Compiled by Antonia Brodie, et al. Volume 2: L-Z. London; New York: British Architectural Library, Royal Institute of British Architects/Continuum, 2001

Edwards, A. T. 'Modern architects: Alexander ('Greek') Thomson'. *Architects' and Builder's Journal* vol. 39, 1914 pp. 334-336

Gildard, Thomas. 'Greek Thomson'. *Proceedings of the Philosophical Society of Glasgow* vol. 19, 30 January 1888 pp.1-27 [reprinted in the *Alexander Thomson Society Newsletter* vol. 20, January 1998 pp. 2-15]

Gildard, Thomass. "'Greek' Thomson". *Proceedings of the Philosophical Society of Glasgow* vol. 24, 3 December 1894 pp. 99-107

Goodhart-Rendel, H. S. 'Rogue architects of the Victorian era'. *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects* vol. 56, 1949 pp. 251-259

Gomme, Andor Harvey and Walker, David. *Architecture of Glasgow*. London: Lund Humphries, 2nd, revised, edition, 1987 Chapter 6: The Individual Contribution of Alexander Thomson pp. 123-152

'Greek' Thomson,. Edited by Gavin Stamp and Sam McKinstry. 'Greek' Thomson,. Edited by Gavin Stamp and Sam McKinstry. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994 [Contents:'On discovering 'Greek' Thomson' by John Summerson; 'In search of purity: Glasgow 1849-56' by Charles McKean; 'The development of Thomson's style: the Scottish background' by David M. Walker; "'Greek' Thomson's literary and pictorial sources' by James Macaulay; 'Thomson's architectural theory' by Sam McKinstry ; 'Thomson and Schleiermacher' by Sam McKinstry and Jane Plenderleith; 'Thomson, Mossman and architectural sculpture' by Alexander Stoddart; 'Thomson's city by John McKean; 'Exploring the wall: the urban façades of Alexander Thomson' by Mark Baines; 'Alexander Thomson and the Glasgow improvement scheme' by Brian Edwards; 'Domestic interiors' by Ian Gow; 'Alexander Thomson's furniture' by Juliet Kinchin; 'Alexander Thomson, Daniel Cottier and the interior of Queen's Park Church' by Sally Joyce Rush; 'The German connection' by David Watkin; 'An American forerunner? Minard Lafever and Alexander Thomson' by Andor Gomme and Gavin Stamp; 'Frontiers of the West--Glasgow and Chicago : the pioneering architectures of Thomson,

Mackintosh and Wright' by Andrew MacMillan; 'A view from the bay window 'by Gavin Stamp]

Hitchcock, Henry-Russell. Early Victorian Architecture in Britain. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954.

Holmwood House: Alexander 'Greek' Thomson. Edinburgh: National Trust for Scotland, c.1999.

Johnson, N. R. J. 'Alexander Thomson: a study of the basic principles of his design'. Quarterly Journal of the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland vol. 43, 1933 pp. 29-38

Law, Graham C. Alexander ('Greek') Thomson, I.A.: a short account of his life and works. Undergraduate thesis, University of Cambridge: Cambridge, 1950

Law, Graham C. 'Greek Thomson'. Architectural Review vol. 115, May 1954 pp. 307-316

McAslan, James. 'Alexander Thomson' in Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects Volume 1. Edited by Adolf K. Plakzek. New York and London: Macmillan and Free Press pp. 208-210

Macaulay, James. 'Greek Thomson in danger'. Architectural Review vol. 136, August 1964 pp. 145-146 [The author expresses concern that Glasgow Corporation is considering demolishing one of the two remaining churches by Thomson in Glasgow]

McEwan, Peter J.M. Dictionary of Scottish Art & Architecture. Woodbridge, Suffolk, England: Antique Collectors' Club Ltd., 1994

McFadzean, Ronald. The life and works of Alexander Thomson. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979.

MacInnes, Randal 'Alexander 'Greek' Thomson : the unknown genius'. Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians vol, 59, 2000 pp. 234-237 [Report on an exhibition at The Lighthouse, Glasgow, July-September 1999]

McKean, J. M. Alexander Thomson. M.A. thesis, University of Exeter, 1971

McKean, John. 'The Architectonics and Ideals of Alexander Thomson'. AA Files no. 9, Summer 1985 pp. 31-44

McKinstry, Sam W. 'Rowand Anderson and 'Greek' Thomson: Scottishness and the Glasgow/Edinburgh divide'. *Architectural Heritage* no. 9, 1998 pp. 31-43

McNeill, Peter and Walker, David M. 'A note on Greek Thomson'. *Glasgow Review* vol. 2, Summer 1965 pp. 44-48

'Obituary'. *The Builder* vol. 33, 10 April 1875 pp. 318-319

'Obituary'. *The Builder* vol. 33, 18 September 1875 p. 840

Smith, William James. 'An architectural anthology - 'Greek' Thomson, Burnet and Mackintosh'. *Quarterly of the Royal Incorporated Architects of Scotland* vol. 85, 1951 pp. 11-13, 56-60

Stamp, Gavin. '"At Once Classic and Picturesque...": Alexander Thomson's Holmwood'. *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* vol. 57, no. 1 March 1998 pp. 46-58

Thomson, Alexander. 'An inquiry as to the appropriateness of the Gothic style for the proposed buildings for the university'. *The Builder* 19 May 1866 pp. 368-371

Thomson, Alexander. 'The Haldane Architecture Lectures. Art and Architecture: A Course of Four Lectures'. *British Architect* vol. 1, 1874 pp. 274-278

Thomson, Alexander. 'The Haldane Architecture Lectures. Art and Architecture: A Course of Four Lectures'. *British Architect* vol. 1, 1874 pp. 354-357

Thomson, Alexander. 'The Haldane Architecture Lectures. Art and Architecture: A Course of Four Lectures'. *British Architect* vol. 2, 1874 pp. 50-52

Thomson, Alexander. 'The Haldane Architecture Lectures. Art and Architecture: A Course of Four Lectures'. *British Architect* vol. 2, 1874 pp. 82-84

Thomson, Alexander. 'The Haldane Architecture Lectures. Art and Architecture: A Course of Four Lectures'. *British Architect* vol. 2, 1874 pp. 272-274

Thomson, Alexander. 'The Haldane Architecture Lectures. Art and Architecture: A Course of Four Lectures'. *British Architect* vol. 2, 1874 pp. 288-289

Thomson, Alexander. 'The Haldane Architecture Lectures. Art and Architecture: A Course of Four Lectures'. *British Architect* vol. 2, 1874 pp. 317-318

Thomson, Alexander. *The Light of Truth and Beauty: The Lectures of Alexander 'Greek' Thomson, Architect, 1817-1875*. Edited by Gavin Stamp. Glasgow:

Alexander Thomson Society, 1999

Thompson, Gordon. The Work of Alexander 'Greek' Thomson. Glasgow : Glasgow School of Art, 1976

Wordsall, Francis. "Greek' Thomson'. *Scottish Field* vol. 109, February 1962 pp. 46-49

Weiss, André. An examination of the potential influence of Karl Friedrich Schinkel on the work of Alexander "Greek" Thomson. M.Arch. thesis, University of Glasgow, 1999.

Links

- Gavin Stamp, ‘Thomson, Alexander [Greek Thomson] (1817–1875)’, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography [Subscription service]
<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27290>
- Frank Arneil Walker. Alexander [Greek] Thomson] Oxford Grove Art Online. [Subscription service]
<https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T084673>
- Dictionary of Scottish Architects 1660-1980
http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_full.php?id=100095
- Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Thomson
- Historic Environment Scotland - 297 entries on Alexander Thomson [Type Alexander Thomson in the search box]
<http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/hes/web/f?p=1505%3A200%3A%3A%3ANO%3ARP%>
- Glasgow Sculpture Database
http://www.glasgowsculpture.com/pg_biography.php?sub=thomson_a
- The National Archives
<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/c/F55214>
- Country Life. Great British Architects: Alexander ‘Greek’ Thomson 1817–75
<https://www.countrylife.co.uk/out-and-about/theatre-film-music/great-british-architects-alexander-greek-thomson-1817-75-25511>
- National Art Library Catalogue [https://nal-](https://nsl-vam.on.worldcat.org/search?databaseList=&queryString=Thomson%2C%20Alexander%20)
[vam.on.worldcat.org/search?databaseList=&queryString=Thomson%2C%20Alexander%20](https://nsl-vam.on.worldcat.org/search?databaseList=&queryString=Thomson%2C%20Alexander%20)
- The Alexander Thomson Society
https://www.alexanderthomsonsociety.org.uk/?page_id=4779
- Undiscovered Scotland. Alexander ‘Greek’ Thomson
<https://www.undiscoveredsotland.co.uk/usbiography/t/alexanderthomson.html>
- National Records Scotland. Alexander 'Greek' Thomson (1817-1875)
<https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/research/learning/hall-of-fame/hall-of-fame-a-z/thomson-alexander>

- The Engine Shed. Alexander Greek Thomson: Glasgow's great visionary builder
<https://blog.engineshed.scot/2020/04/09/alexander-greek-thomson-glasgows-visionary-builder/>
- Lionel Gossman. Alexander "Greek" Thomson (1817-1875): An Introduction to His Life and Work. Victorian Web
<https://victorianweb.org/art/architecture/thomson/intro.html>
- Ann Fotheringham. Tribute reveals how much Glasgow loved Alexander 'Greek' Thomson. Glasgow Evening Times
<https://www.glasgowtimes.co.uk/news/19170792.his-death-loss-art---tribute-reveals-much-glasgow-loved-greek-thomson/>
- National Library of Scotland. Greek Thomson
<https://movingimage.nls.uk/film/3636>
- gerryblaikie.com. Alexander Greek Thomson, architect
<http://www.gerryblaikie.com/thomson/>
- architectureglasgow. 1-10 Moray Place [Designed by Thomson in 1859-60]
<http://www.architectureglasgow.co.uk/greekthomson.morayplace.html>
- Visitors Guide to Scotland - Greek Thomson Architecture
<https://www.visitorsguidetoscotland.com/2021/07/greek-thomson-architecture/>
- YouTube. Greek Thomson, The Sixty Steps
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Bd7iKldyBs>
- YouTube. Alexander 'Greek' Thomson Documentary OTB
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qm2DVYZjyhA>
- YouTube. BBC Two 'Greek' Thomson Glasgow's Master Builder (2017)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1kCeBGTdsfM>