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ANTIQUES & DECORATIVE ARTS 1850-1960



AN IMPORTANT  
**CHARLES RENNIE MACKINTOSH**  
OAK SIDEBOARD WITH RADOLITH INLAY

c.1918 / 19  
FOR W.J. BASSETT-LOWKE  
OR  
F.M. JONES  
NORTHAMPTON, ENGLAND



## C.R. MACKINTOSH SIDEBOARD & THE NORTHAMPTON COMMISSIONS C1918/19



AN IMPORTANT CHARLES RENNIE MACKINTOSH  
OAK SIDEBOARD WITH RADOLITH INLAY  
PREVIOUSLY MISSING/UNTRACED

C.1918 / 19 FOR W.J. BASSETT-LOWKE OR F.M. JONES

P.O.A.

Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868 - 1928) is without doubt, one of the truly outstanding, influential, and arguably among the best known, of late 19thc/early 20thc British (Scottish) architect-designers.

Having left school aged 14, he began training as an architect and in 1889 joined the firm of Honeyman and Keppie. Concurrently, he also attended evening classes at the Glasgow School of Art, where he met his future wife, the equally talented artist, Margaret Macdonald (1864-1933). Between them, his sister in law Francis and friend Herbert McNair, they contributed significantly to the distinctive style of decorative art then known as The Glasgow Style or School.

Mackintosh's early major commissions & works major works include The Glasgow School of Art, The Hill House, Scotland Street School and the amazing tea room interiors for Miss Catherine Cranston. His wife Margaret, in the early 1900s, co-worked with him on the decorative detailing of his interiors.

Around 1913/14, Mackintosh left Honeyman and Keppie and along with his wife, moved to England, firstly to Walberswick, Suffolk then later to Chelsea in London. During that period, he concentrated on painting watercolours, and also engaged in textile design; in collaboration with Margaret.

The originality of Mackintosh's style was always appreciated in Europe, especially in Germany and more so in Austria, where he received the acclaim and recognition for his designs that perhaps was never shown at home. Indeed, he contributed much there; which leads us to the Northampton commissions, such as this sideboard. The furniture Mackintosh produced in Northampton circa 1916-1919, expressing original new ideas, were very similar to furniture development designs taking place in Vienna, where he had previously exhibited and clearly influenced.

WJ Bassett-Lowke was a manufacturer of scale model toys and an early member of the Design & Industries Association. 78 Derngate in Northampton was purchased for him by his father as a wedding present. Keen to encompass new standards and commission new designers Bassett- Lowke engaged Mackintosh (after a recommendation) to entirely remodel the interiors of 78 Derngate. Mackintosh's next work for Bassett-Lowke was in Candide Cottage in Roade, Northampton; his country retreat, where Mackintosh designed the dining room furniture and decorations.

The designs that Mackintosh undertook for the above show him working in a bold new style of decoration and construction. It was an output of extraordinary vitality and originality. According to the renowned authority on Mackintosh & previous Keeper of Fine Arts at Glasgow Art Gallery & Museum, Roger Billcliffe, the furniture for the Northampton commissions, "is probably the most modern and utilitarian ever designed by Mackintosh...shapes and simple and robust; the decoration is quiet, and the materials are basic; stained oak and the new substances Erinoid\* and Rexine... perhaps the closest Mackintosh ever came to furniture of such English designers as Gimson or Barnsley".

\*Radolit was an exciting new organic proprietary casein based plastic like Erinoid and Galalith, originally made in Germany; lent itself well to many decorative uses.

This oak sideboard is a rare and exciting example of that output; a genuine tour de force. Comprising a backboard with shallow double stepped edging, and inlaid with six sets of three rows of bluey-green Radolit (aka Erinoid or Galalith), and three small Radolit squares at each side. Five central drawers to main sideboard,



Dining Room, Candide Cottage, Roade, Northampton. Image source untraced.

with simple recessed rectangular handles, flanked by double door cabinets with tapering squared handles; all inlaid with the Radolit. Further inlay to lower apron with three pairs of rectangular Radolit panels; also, a matching single panel inlay to each side.

Dimensions: 7ft 6" wide, 4ft high and 2ft deep overall

The furniture was made by the skilled German craftsmen internees at Knockaloe Camp on the Isle of Man, under the supervision of Otto Matt. According to the literature and archive drawings, only two of these sideboards were made with the blue-green Radolit; one for Bassett-Lowke and the other for his brother-in-law, FM Jones, both of which are currently recorded as missing and untraced, until now. A third variant appeared with, curiously, walnut inlay instead of the Radolit (see Sotheby's Applied Arts Auction; Dec 19th 1986, Lot 263).



Service trolley, Candide Cottage, Roade, Northampton.

Many of the original Mackintosh drawings and archives relating to the Northampton commissions are in the Mackintosh Collection at the Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow.

### Bibliography

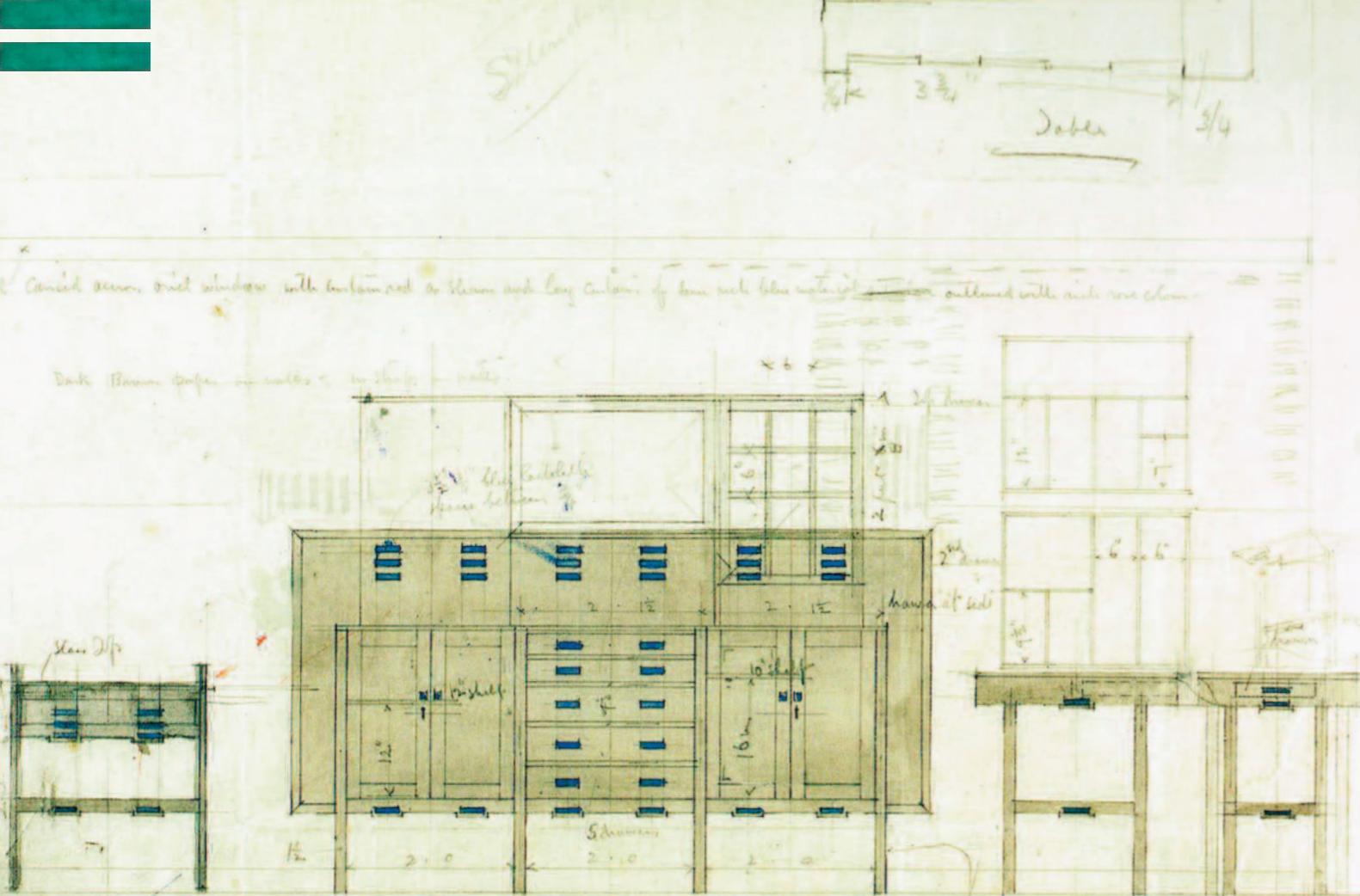
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Ideal Home, October 1920

Sotheby's Applied Arts Sale 19th December 1986 Lot 263.



*Design for a sideboard for WJ Bassett-Lowke. Image courtesy of Hunterian Museum & Art Gallery*

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