DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE IN THE JAZZ AGE

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ART DECO SCOTLAND

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REGAL

INTRODUCTION

Glamorous super-cinemas, flat-roofed villas, luxurious ocean liners, fashion boutiques, railway posters, tramcars, hydro-electric power stations, patterned linoleum, pithead baths and an Empire Exhibition: these were just some of the many diverse Scottish manifestations of the interwar modern design styles that since the late 1960s have been collectively defined as representing Art Deco. With a northerly maritime climate, Scotland may have seemed an unlikely place for large numbers of buildings and instances of design and visual culture exhibiting elements reflective of the sunny south and of smart metropolises such as Paris and New York to have materialised. Yet, the style was very influential among Scots, and during the 1920s and 1930s a remarkably large and diverse variety of Art Deco objects, structures and images were created. The production and experience of Art Deco in Scotland raises issues of how in the interwar era fashionable design spread through the expanding media from cultural centres to relatively small and unlikely places such as Peterhead, Tobermory and Stornoway.

It was the publication in 1968 of *Art Deco of the 20s and 30s* by Bevis Hillier, a young Oxford-educated historian and aesthete, that first provided a definitive guide to this highly appealing but hitherto critically neglected aspect of interwar visual culture.[1] Since Hillier's identification of Art Deco, which he argued to have been the last 'total design style', interest in it has grown greatly and, where once buildings in the style were demolished with nary a backward glance, they are now usually listed, while Art Deco objects are sought by an international market of collectors.

The term 'Art Déco' had first been used by the Swiss-French architect, artist and theoretician Le Corbusier (1887–1965) in a review he wrote of the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industries Modernes, a great exhibition of the decorative arts held in central Paris in 1925; this was published in the journal *L'Esprit Nouveau*.[2] His diminution of 'Arts Décoratifs' was reflective of his disdain for the majority of the exhibits shown within the Exposition, which he felt to be inappropriately ornate distractions from the more fundamental modernist design and cultural reform that he and his acolytes were seeking to achieve.[3] Thereafter, the term did not again appear significantly within architecture and design discourse until 1966 when, also in Paris, a retrospective exhibition of modern interwar design, entitled 'Les Années "25" Art Déco/Bauhaus/Stijl/Esprit Nouveau' took place at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs. It was the catalogue for this exhibition that probably inspired Hillier's work.[4] With hindsight, 'Art Deco' was an ideal moniker, being short, slick and indicative of sophisticated, fast-moving and up-to-date glamour and stylishness.

The content of the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industries Modernes was highly diverse in character, encompassing pavilions that harked back

The Regal, Bathgate
Andrew D Haxton, 1938
Bruce Peter

to the ancient world and many more that sought to evoke colonial exoticism, plus a small number that were radically avant-garde. Britain's (and Scotland's) displays there were worthy but unexceptional. Whereas the Turin International Exhibition (Esposizione internazionale delle industrie e del lavoro) of 1911 had featured three rooms designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868–1928) and Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh (1864–1933), the Scottish exhibits in Paris were comparatively paltry. This reflected changed circumstances in the wake of the First World War which led to a more conservative vision of an imperial Britain centred upon London, rather than the design novelties from regional industrial centres such as Glasgow that were shown in Turin. The British displays at the Paris Exposition were influenced by the approach applied at the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley the previous year. As staging that event had used up most of the British government's exhibition budget, the UK's presence at the Paris Exposition was smaller than might have been expected of one of the major manufacturing nations. Nonetheless, its contribution comprised three elements. One was a pavilion that somewhat resembled a church on the Esplanade des Invalides by the River Seine designed by the American-born, English-educated, École des Beaux Arts-trained Howard Robertson (1888–1963) of Easton & Robertson. The others were a restaurant with a festively painted tented roof by the main entrance to the entire exhibition at the Pont Alexandre III, and display rooms within the Grand Palais, which was an existing structure containing exhibits from various participating nations.

The preparation of the British exhibits was overseen by HRH Prince Arthur of Connaught, President of the Council of the British Section, while their installation was arranged by Colonel Henry Cole. A relative and namesake of Sir Henry Cole, co-organiser of the 1851 Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations, he was a veteran of the Indian Army who in 1921 was made Director of the Exhibitions Division of the Department of Overseas Trade and thereafter had a central role in organising the exhibits at the British Empire Exhibition.[5] Neither Prince Arthur nor Colonel Cole was of progressive persuasion, their desire being to express British tradition and to avoid at all cost any risk of the nation appearing insufficiently dignified. In these aims at least, they apparently succeeded. The *Glasgow Herald* reported somewhat fawningly that the British Pavilion was 'a monument of dignity, not without an ornate note, which gives it distinctness. The building, graceful in its architecture, is symbolic of the country and the Empire it represents. There is a stateliness, a grandeur about it which differentiates it from other pavilions in the exhibition'.[6]

The Scottish contribution comprised works by nine students and staff members of Glasgow School of Art in textiles, jewellery and metalwork, there being four framed samplers, a silver brooch and items such as a candle-holder and a decorative plaque in brass.[7] These creations were undoubtedly virtuous, but their Arts and Crafts-inflected design reflected safely established approaches to aesthetics and making. In contrast with Britain, several of the other countries participating used the opportunity to assert boldly visionary identities that looked optimistically towards the future. Soviet Russia's contribution, designed by Konstantin Melnikov (1890–1974), was perhaps the most daring, its dramatic constructivist forms unambiguously portraying the aim of giving rise to a new kind of society. Largest in number, scale and ostentation were the French pavilions and displays; indeed, although the Exposition was promoted as 'international', a very large proportion was provided by the home nation, which used the opportunity to re-assert itself as the world's leading creator of all that was chic and luxurious. Germany was not invited to attend as Franco-German relations remained at a low ebb as a result of the recent war and post-war settlement, while America, which was invited, refused to exhibit, claiming that as it copied all of its 'high end' design from Europe, it would have nothing original to show.[8] This position, however, merely reflects the reactionary conservatism of its established arbiters of taste who would not have considered such quintessentially American cultural innovations as skyscrapers or jazz music as worthy of consideration.

In the years following the Paris Exposition, Art Deco forms and imagery spread around the world, manifesting in objects and edifices ranging in scale and complexity from tiny trinkets to the giant skyscrapers and trans-Atlantic liners that were among the largest human-made objects yet conceived. Art Deco appeared in quantity throughout the Americas, in the British, French and Dutch colonies and in China, Japan and elsewhere in the East. In such contexts, it combined with vernacular elements.[9]

For many, Art Deco is the luxurious-looking and stylistically exaggerated yet highly mannered aesthetic of a majority of the French exhibits and of decorative craft work in this style created in the exhibition's wake. Some

British Pavilion, Paris Exposition
Howard Robertson of Easton & Robertson, 1925
Bruce Peter collection

have suggested that, owing to its having been applied retrospectively by Hiller in *Art Deco of the 20s and 30s* as an 'umbrella' term, encompassing very broad diversities of decorative work with points of origination all over the world, Art Deco is more a 'tendency' than a 'style'. The American cultural critic Susan Sontag argues that style is omnipresent in human cultural production and that what often distinguishes early twentieth-century decorative work is its sense of artifice, which she terms 'stylishness'. She also notes that such theatricality is an essential ingredient of camp.[10] Art Deco imagery and ornamentation could indeed appear effeminate or exaggeratedly masculine and its concentration as surface rather than substance provoked and reflected desire. In terms of the framing of design debates in the mid-twentieth century, however, none of these characteristics was considered meritorious. Since then, revisionist stances have led opinion to shift, with the result that the style's qualities have come to be better appreciated.

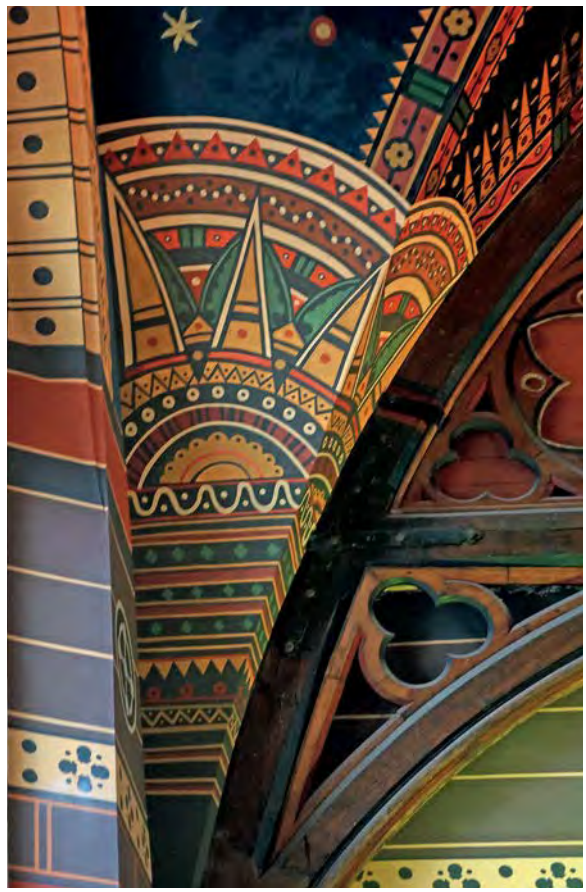
Nowadays, Art Deco usually has a broad definition, encompassing all essentially modern interwar design that was inexplicable within the functional and rational terms of modernism, as defined by architects and theorists such as Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius (1883–1969) and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886–1969) and by the American art critic Clement Greenberg. (The latter promoted the concept of 'medium-specific purity', through which each art form would focus only upon its own unique characteristic.) A consequence was the marginalisation of mixed approaches typically found within the mainstream of decorative arts output.[11] For many, modernism in architecture and design was characterised by three principles – the use of advanced technology, futuristically minimalist or highly abstracted aesthetics and a desire to use architecture, design and visual culture to achieve positive social transformation.[12] By contrast, Art Deco elements were often applied as embellishment upon underlying structures that used well-established technologies and on products and in environments that were primarily commercial in aim and aspiration. But such distinctions are clearer in theory than in practice. Particularly in the Francophone world, the term 'art

moderne' was often used for hybrid work, which in any case represented the great majority of broadly 'modern' architecture and design output. (This combined the first and last words of the Paris Exposition's name but could also be interpreted as a successor term to Art Nouveau.)

The Art Deco style's architectural roots long predated the 1925 Paris Exposition, however. They were well established in existing decorative variations of European neoclassicism that were embellished with baroque and rococo-derived naturalistic ornamentation – and it was classical proportions and symmetry, rather than modernist abstract formalism, that initially usually governed Art Deco composition. The mannered design forms evident in Art Deco had a key point of origin in the wake of a different famous exhibition of the past – The Great Exhibition of 1851, which was housed in a vast iron and glass temporary pavilion erected in London's Hyde Park (which would become known as the Crystal Palace). Five years later, one of its organisers, the architect, designer, curator and critic Owen Jones (1809–1874), published a folio of patterns for decoration entitled *The Grammar of Ornament*.[13] Jones and his followers argued that all peoples and cultures produced patterning and that there was a universal grammar underpinning these forms that involved flattening out and abstracting imagery inspired by nature into simplified, repetitive forms. Only in Europe in the wake of Raphael's use of single-point perspective had this universal grammar been broken. Furthermore, for industrial manufacture, the universal grammar was ideal and it was morally wrong – indeed, a visual lie – to print three-dimensional perspective on flat surfaces. The content of Jones' *Grammar of Ornament* was eagerly imbibed by British manufacturers of wall finishes, tilework and textiles. Designs derived from the exemplars of patterning it contained came to feature heavily in British and foreign interiors of the latter Victorian era and thereafter.

In the years leading up to and after the Great Exhibition, Government Schools of Design were formed in response to increasing competition between the industrialised nations, the intention being that their graduates would work in industry to improve the appearance of British manufactured output. Glasgow's began in 1845, and eight years later was renamed Glasgow School of Art – a decision underscoring design's relatively lowly status in the cultural hierarchy at that time.[14] In the latter nineteenth century, one especially influential graduate of the Government School of Design in London was Christopher Dresser (1834–1904). A Glaswegian by birth, he used heavily abstracted and aestheticised forms derived from plants to shape strikingly novel tableware and household ornaments, such as 'Clutha' glass, created in the 1880s for the Glasgow manufacturer James Couper & Sons.[15] With hindsight, many of Dresser's designs appear to have exemplified what would become characteristics of Art Deco and his approach continued to be influential in the interwar era and subsequently.

As Scotland saw itself as a forward-looking industrialised nation with a strong engineering culture, there was a well-established interest in whatever was up to date or emergent in visual culture. In the mid-Victorian period, the United Presbyterian Church



Dowanhill Church, Glasgow
William Leiper and Daniel Cottier, 1866
Bruce Peter

St Vincent Street Church, Glasgow
Alexander Thomson, 1859
HES SC777202

Guthrie & Wells brochure
Guthrie & Wells, 1925
Bruce Peter Collection

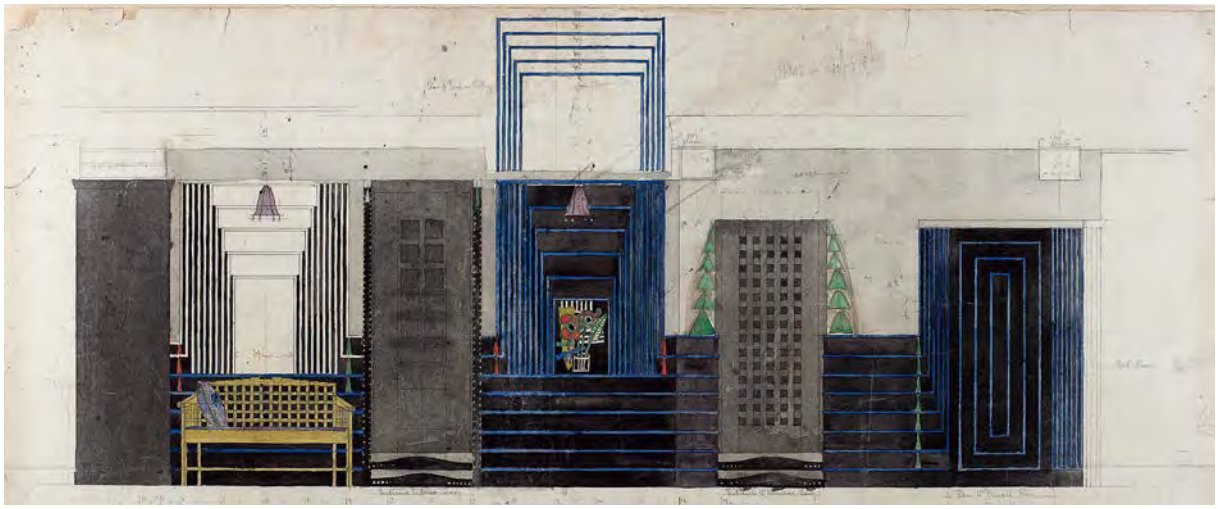
became a major patron of the decorative arts, using coloured, textured and patterned surfaces in its churches as a means of encouraging congregations to transcend their thinking from the earthly to the spiritual. For example, in Dowanhill Church in Glasgow, completed in 1866 to a design by the highly imaginative William Leiper (1839–1916), the entire interior was painted in a vividly ornate decorative scheme, embellished with equally vivid stained glass by Daniel Cottier (1838–1891). One of Cottier's pupils was Andrew Wells (1845–1918), who subsequently went into partnership with William Guthrie (1851–1939) in 1897, forming the major Glasgow interior designers and furnishing manufacturers, Guthrie & Wells. In 1913, Guthrie headhunted his successor John Alexander Christie (1879–1964) from the London wallpaper manufacturers, John Line & Sons.[16] With Christie as managing director and principal designer, in the 1930s Guthrie & Wells produced colourful Art Deco interiors for restaurants, hotels, cinemas and other commercial premises for hospitality and entertainment. Their designs varied widely between boldly coherent schemes and ones that were merely twee.[17]

Mid-nineteenth-century church interiors and those of private homes and commercial premises designed by Alexander 'Greek' Thomson (1817–1875) likewise were highly coloured and patterned in a manner that would not look significantly out of place in the Art Deco era. His Egyptian Halls of 1870–72 in central Glasgow were to prove especially prescient as they deployed decorative

forms that were not only favoured by Owen Jones but would experience a further revival in the interwar period as a result of the discovery of the intact tomb of the ancient pharaoh Tutankhamun in 1922.[18] The stylised forms and polychromatic ornamentation of ancient Egyptian architecture and visual culture were highly influential in Art Deco's initial development.

The prosperous industrialists of west central Scotland whose wealth enabled the patronage of art, design and architecture may have usually appeared outwardly conservative – but even in the latter nineteen century, several exhibited progressive taste tendencies. For a few, commissioning grand villas in Arts and Crafts or Art Nouveau styles signalled being up to date. For others, modernity was expressed by collecting French and Dutch art of the Impressionist school. So popular did this become among Glasgow's wealthy elite than a picture-framer and gallery owner Alex Reid came to specialise in its sale. The Scottish Colourists, a group of painters whom Reid also represented, followed a similarly Frenchified approach.[19] Around 1908–1909, John Duncan Fergusson (1874–1961) painted the scene on the terrace of the Café D'Harcourt in Paris, which was a popular meeting place for employees of the city's fashion studios. There, he captured models, dressed in the latest and most audacious styles, who had come to dine and socialise. Fergusson's treatment of the scene, with sharp black and white contrasts, pastel hues and bright floral flourishes, accords with a Francophile Scottish appreciation the fin-de-siècle Parisian aesthetic culture from which Art Deco would subsequently emerge.[20] In the first half of the 1920s, Reid exhibited works in Glasgow by Paul Gauguin (1848–1903) and Henri Matisse (1869–1954), among others, their combination of modern sophistication and tropical exoticism being an escapist antidote to the dark and often cold and wet industrial city to which they were transposed. In addition, he dealt in Japanese art, which since the mid-nineteenth century had been admired and increasingly sought by European aesthetes. Such exotic and orientalist imagery also influenced aspects of Art Deco ornamentation.

Derngate, Northampton
Charles Rennie Mackintosh, 1916
Bruce Peter

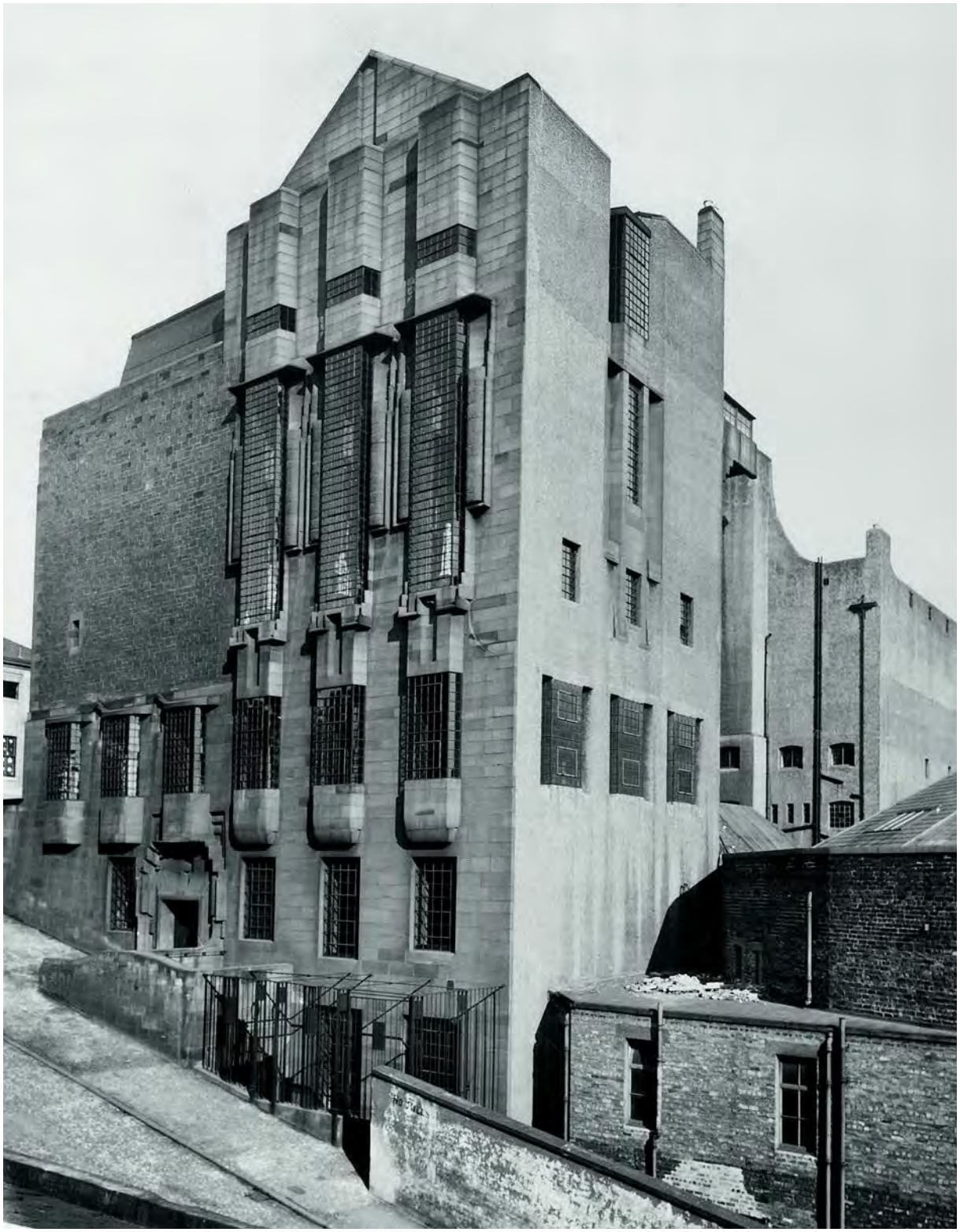


'The Dug-Out' design, Cranston's Willow Tearoom, Glasgow
Charles Rennie Mackintosh, 1917
GSA Archives

The Edwardian era witnessed an economic boom, during which much new construction occurred. Buildings in the Glasgow Style of Art Nouveau were small in number but aesthetically significant, finding popularity especially among the more prosperous of the era's young adults. The daughters and sons of the mid-Victorian entrepreneurs and industrialists, they sought out such fresh visual culture, symbolising youth and beauty, and made it distinct to their own generation.[21] In Glasgow, the tearooms designed by the Mackintoshes for Catherine Cranston's successful chain were fine Scottish examples of a phenomenon that spread Europe-wide wherever significant industrial wealth and the craving for the novelty it enabled were found. They were forerunners of the many Art Deco catering outlets added in the 1920s and 1930s.

In the years preceding the First World War, the leading members of the Vienna Secession, founded in 1897 to encourage novel artistic and decorative work, and of the subsequent Deutscher Werkbund, established in 1907 to enhance German industrial design, developed new geometric forms of decoration. These were to an extent reflected in the boldly stepped door architrave and vertical fenestration of Glasgow School of Art's western elevation, designed by Mackintosh. They could also be seen in the hallway and bedroom he designed for the home of W J Basset-Lowke at 78 Derngate in Northampton in 1916, as well as in a striking scheme for a small space added to Cranston's Willow Tearoom on Glasgow's Sauchiehall Street, known as 'The Dug-Out'.[22] In ensuing years, Mackintosh produced numerous designs for textiles and ceramics with geometric, wave and floral patterns and imagery, but no further designs by him for buildings or interiors were realised.[23] In the German-speaking world, where his inventiveness had been much admired, a new generation continued to develop similar forms into the dynamic modes of visual and spatial expression collectively known as Expressionism. In its early iterations, this often tended towards a modernised and greatly simplified version of the neo-gothic, involving the dramatic repetition of spiky, angular, slightly sinister shapes, which may in part have reflected their designers' wartime experiences. A similarly disturbing visual language was apparent in German film sets of the early-to-mid 1920s.[24] Exaggerated vertical and horizontal forms and interplay between them, as found in some expressionist imagery, would become a frequent characteristic of Art Deco composition. The former were perhaps suggestive of strength and levity while the latter could imply fast horizontal movement. Repetitive patterns of columns and bays, though a motif rooted in the Ancient World, were in modern contexts also relatable to ideas of mass production and consumption.

Much greater in quantity than Glasgow Style Art Nouveau buildings – but attracting far less retrospective interest – were large commercial edifices in the manner



of the École des Beaux Arts, the facades of which were composed of giant pilasters interspersed with window bays featuring restrained baroque enrichment and with deep cornicing around the roof edge. The appointment in 1904 of the Parisian architect Eugène Bourdon (1870–1916) as head of the Glasgow School of Architecture, the new joint programme of the city's School of Art and Royal Technical College, influenced the subsequent trajectory of the Beaux Arts style in Scotland. Beforehand, Bourdon had worked in New York, where he had been involved in the design of a skyscraper and so he had an appreciation for American monumentality and repetitive detailing, as well as a decorative sensibility gained through his French training.[25] Commercial blocks in the Beaux Art style continued to be built in Scottish cities well into the 1930s, albeit with Art Deco detailing appended where earlier the enrichments had been either conventionally neoclassical or baroque-inspired.

As Anthony Jackson showed in *The Politics of Architecture: A History of Modern Architecture in Britain*, published in 1970, only a couple of years after Hillier's work on Art Deco had appeared and making a comparably revisionist analysis, in 1930s Europe, attitudes to matters of architectural style were often the subject of factious debates. Arguments between British advocates of modern architecture and of the neoclassical occurred against a background of the extreme politics of Soviet Russia and Germany, in both of which avant-garde modernism had been suppressed in favour of state-approved neoclassicism. While there were fundamental theoretical differences underpinning these polarities of visual expression, in actuality there was often a remarkable similarity of appearance in what was built, elements of the two frequently appearing in hybridised form. Even so, whether a facade composition was symmetrical or asymmetrical, had vertically or horizontally arranged fenestration, used a modern or classical font for signage and had either a cornice or curved corners apparently counted for a great deal with regard to whether it was likely to be well-received or disparaged by particular critics. Neoclassicism was regarded as a safe choice while too many modern decorative flourishes risked signifying adherence to current fashion with a commercial intent, which was thought unworthy by arbiters of architectural taste in both the classical and modern schools of thought.[26]

Particularly in its earlier manifestations of the latter 1920s and early 1930s, Art Deco building facades in Britain were essentially neoclassical, neo-Georgian or Beaux Arts in basic composition, which tended to favour symmetry. Usually, but not always, stripped-back versions of the neoclassical were preferred, with the exclusion of cornicing and columns in favour of flattened surfaces and with stepped rectangular pediments and architraves, rather than triangular-headed ones. In the 1920s, a distinctly monumental school of design emerged on both sides of the Atlantic and this was used for some government buildings and many commercial ones too, the aim being to project images of order and power as well as modernity. More generally, detailing tended either to be reflective of ancient patterning originating in the Near East, or abstract wave and zig-zag shapes that might also have had Mayan or Egyptian overtones, or could equally have been inspired by elements of continental avant-garde art, such as Cubism and Futurism, or even the rhythms of jazz music. In the USA, comparable architectural composition and decorative forms were found in designs by Frank Lloyd Wright (1857–1959), who was admired in the 1920s by British architects of progressive persuasion. Following the Paris Exposition, French-influenced Art Deco adornment began to be applied on New York skyscrapers, such as the 56-storey Chanin Building, constructed between 1927 and 1929 to a design by Sloan & Robertson.[27] Skyscraper imagery was thereafter emulated at much smaller scales as external and interior decoration on Scottish commercial buildings, especially when American references were thought appropriate.

Significant public, educational, commercial and exhibition buildings were occasionally adorned with Art Deco architectural sculpture, which was usually in essence neoclassical. The desire to represent handsome and heroic bodies on the one hand reflected British imperialist mythologising and on the other, ideals of health and youthful beauty that came to be emulated right across the 1930s European ideological spectrum. This ranged from communism at one extreme, via

Glasgow School of Art
Charles Rennie Mackintosh, 1909
HES SC1427928

various more moderate political shades, to fascism at the other. God-like and Goddess-like figures with unblemished skin and stylised hair were moreover a leitmotif of interwar figurative painting and commercial art. These were in some senses relatable to the realist tradition, while also referencing the countering tendency towards greater abstraction, the latter particularly apparent in background treatments that often were reduced to patterns of parallel lines and curves.[28]

At the popular end of the commercial spectrum, meanwhile, entrepreneurs realised that decorating their premises with jazz-inspired forms and patterning was an inexpensive way of signalling to a youthful clientele that they were fashionably up to date. Jazz had first arrived in Scotland in the late Edwardian period, heralding an increasing American cultural influence. 'Alexander's Ragtime Band', composed by Irving Berlin and released in March 1911, was a bandstand favourite with attendees of the Scottish Exhibition of National History, Art and Industry, which opened two months thereafter in Glasgow's Kelvingrove Park.[29] After the hiatus caused by the First World War, in December 1919, the 50-strong Southern Syncopated Orchestra, led by Will Marion Cook, arrived from the USA to perform a wide repertoire of jazz, ragtime and spirituals in the city's Kelvin Hall.[30] In 1932, Louis Armstrong performed in Glasgow, followed in 1933 by Duke Ellington.[31] (On a subsequent visit, Armstrong noted that his surname came from the Scottish managers of a plantation on which his forebears had been enslaved.[32]) Jazz brought a style of dancing that was distinct from European ballroom conventions and this, in turn, encouraged the wearing of novel styles of fashion and jewellery for easier movement and to complement the music's form. Syncopated jazz rhythms, moreover, seemed to express musically what were already emergent trends in progressive European visual culture, which in the twentieth century's first decades veered increasingly in favour of bold, contrasting colours and abstraction. Partly these trends reflected a desire to capture the speed and ephemerality of contemporary urban life, but they may also have been a reaction against the strictly formal neoclassical grandeur of the public buildings and monuments commissioned by the great powers. For many of the still-young veterans of the trenches, informality reflected a modern cosmopolitanism that was more attractive than expressions of nationalist pomposity and jingoism. British architectural and cultural critics were unenamoured with what became known as the jazz moderne style, which from their perspective seemed to epitomise the worst aspects of commercial expediency and, worse still, Americanisation. (Though rarely directly expressed, such positions perhaps also reflected a latent racial prejudice against a visual culture arising from a predominantly black musical origin.) Although particularly notable in interior decoration, jazz moderne patterning adorned objects of many kinds, ranging from commercial art and printed textiles to furniture and tableware, the output of the British ceramicist Clarice Cliff (1899–1972) being particularly emblematic of the style's distinctive characteristics of colour and form.

Later in the 1930s, the size, splendour and style of ocean liners, some of the biggest and most technologically advanced of which were constructed in Clyde shipyards, helped to make internationally fashionable a nautical aesthetic of elongated horizontals with portholes or narrow glazing strips and walls with curved and chamfered corners. In Britain, North America and elsewhere in the English-speaking world, this tended to be described as 'streamline moderne' and, on account of the somewhat improved economic conditions, a greater amount of it was built in Britain than of the earlier, angular variety of Art Deco. Although, for some, Art Deco and streamline moderne are distinct styles, each with its own characteristics, they often manifested in hybridised form and so in the present work they will be considered within a broader understanding of Art Deco. There were also stylistic lags as some architects, designers and their clients who were less conscious of the latest aesthetic developments continued to design in the earlier manner.

A simple distinction between a building or object that was 'moderne' and one that was 'modernist' would be that the former would be designed in the established way from the outside in, beginning with the composition of the exterior, whereas the latter would be designed from the inside out with the facades merely a skin over whatever arrangement of internal content would best fulfil the programme. The moderne thus usually appeared to be formally relatively conventional, but with up-to-date detailing, whereas 'true' modernism aspired to achieve outcomes that were spatially, structurally and technologically more daring. In actuality, and not least in Scotland, as we shall see, it was usual that architects and designers of progressive persuasion fused together a range of what they considered to be modern elements. Reflecting this

Hilversum Town Hall, the Netherlands
Willem Marinus Dudok, 1931
Bruce Peter

hybridity, in the present work, the terms Art Deco and moderne are often used in combination.

Moderne building frontages are often composed of primary forms, such as horizontal and vertical cuboids, vertical projecting triangular sections and half-cylinders, used either symmetrically or as asymmetrical abstract formalist compositions. The earliest points of origin of this approach predated its widespread application in Britain and the USA by a couple of decades. In Germany, a pavilion designed by Walter Gropius for the 1914 Deutscher Werkbund exhibition in Cologne featured entirely glazed cylindrical stair towers at either end. Later, in the 1920s, Erich Mendelsohn (1887–1953) was the most prominent of a number of German commercial architects, mainly located in Berlin, who sought by similar means to reflect the dynamism of modern conditions in their designs for department stores and other new city-centre premises. Mendelsohn's approach had been inspired by a trip he had made to the USA in 1924 in the company of his friend, the film director Fritz Lang. The forms of the German ocean liner *Columbus*, on which Mendelsohn travelled, were translated into his subsequent building compositions.[33] Whereas Le Corbusier, who also greatly admired liners, advocated emulating their functional, technological and organisational aspects, Mendelsohn was more interested in their symbolism, using in his buildings features such as sundecks with ship-like railings and porthole windows.

In the Netherlands, meanwhile, the revolutionary De Stijl movement advocated the creation of a new universal visual culture using only such primary forms, along with primary colours, that would be equally comprehensible by everyone, transcending all existing cultural boundaries. It was a kind of Esperanto in art, design and architecture and was manifested in works in various disciplines by, for example, the artist Piet Mondrian (1872–1944) and the architects and designers Gerrit Rietveld (1888–1964) and J J P Oud (1890–1963), the latter of whom was the City Architect responsible for housing in Rotterdam.[34] Elsewhere in the Netherlands, Willem Marinus Dudok (1884–1974) designed a town hall for the new town of Hilversum as a series of rectilinear brick volumes.[35] Its clean-lined appearance, achieved through the use of a traditional material, proved inspirational for British architects when similarly faced with the task of lending dignity to large free-standing structures with relatively few windows.[36]

In Scandinavia, the Stockholm Exhibition of 1930 comprised nautical-looking curving pavilions in white with extensive glazing, sun terraces, coloured banners and bold graphics outlined in neon. Designed by a team of young Swedish architects led by Erik Gunnar Asplund (1885–1940), who was already well-established, it looked positively utopian under Nordic summer skies and attracted international admiration.[37]

Similar forms to those used by Mendelsohn in Berlin, Oud in Rotterdam, and Asplund and his colleagues in Stockholm were even found in new buildings in Moscow and elsewhere in 1920s Soviet Russia, where the communist government was the ideological antithesis of Mendelsohn's entrepreneurial clients.[38] In Russia and Germany, the subsequent rises of Stalin and Hitler mostly snuffed out such approaches in favour of monumental neoclassicism expressive of order, hierarchy and state dominance. Mendelsohn escaped to Britain, where his work was greatly admired by influential RIBA members.

Stockholm Exhibition
Erik Gunnar Asplund *et al*, 1930
Architectural Press Archive / RIBA Collections

Art Deco and moderne thus spanned a wide hinterland, ranging from high Parisian sophistication at one extreme, through adaptations and combinations of various European modern aesthetics, to American mass culture at the other. While their characteristic forms are recognisable across these contexts, there is great variation in their scaling, in the complexity of their detailing, in the methods of making and in the quality of materials employed in their execution.

By the mid-1930s, when new buildings exhibiting Art Deco and moderne characteristics began to appear throughout Britain, the range of proprietary framing systems and off-the-shelf componentry for cladding and fenestration had proliferated. While reinforced concrete or steel framework could potentially be faced in a wide variety of design styles, certain facade finishes and types of windows were either specifically intended to assist in achieving Art Deco and moderne aesthetics, or were capable of adaptation. Since the latter Victorian era, faience ceramic tiles and blocks for facades and interiors had been made in Staffordshire. Architects arranged designs with reference to the dimensions and shapes listed in the manufacturers' catalogues, then submitted them for making, the finished kits being delivered to construction sites nationwide by road and rail. Although faience blocks could be moulded in a broad range of styles, the material particularly lent itself to smooth or fluted Art Deco or moderne treatments. Faience was most often in cream, biscuit brown or white, though it could also be coloured light green, orange-red or blue, the latter shades usually sparingly used, presumably on account of their greater cost. An alternative to faience was reconstructed stone which, similarly to terrazzo, comprised cement mixed with coloured granite chips, albeit formed into blocks, the outer facings of which were mechanically polished to achieve a slightly shiny, grime-resistant surface.

A third option, popular for Art Deco and moderne shop, pub, cafe and restaurant fascias, was Vitrolite coloured glass panelling. The Vitrolite company of Chicago was the leading maker and in 1932 the British glass manufacturer Pilkington of St Helens bought a licence to produce and sell its products in the UK. On

both sides of the Atlantic, re-facing in Vitrolite became a common and successful way of modernising high-street premises and thereby hopefully boosting trade. Vitrolite could have graphics and patterns etched into its surface and enamel paint could also be applied. Other than stark black and white, its colours are usually soft – mint green, buttermilk yellow, pale pink or light blue being typical. A derivative of Vitrolite was Vitroflex, made from coloured or mirrored glass strips that could be wrapped round circular columns or used to line curved niches, giving them a faceted appearance with glinting highlights. Vitrolite is, however, very prone to breakage and, although once widely used, few completely intact installations survive. Faience, reconstructed stone and Vitrolite could all be washed clean, enabling frontages to stand out from neighbouring buildings clad in sooty sandstone.

The cheapest – and, with hindsight, the most problematic cladding material – was asbestos cement sheeting. An Empire product mined in Canada, asbestos was considered almost a magical material, being light, fireproof and, when mixed with cement or plaster, capable of being moulded and painted. It was only later that its fibres were realised to be carcinogenic. In the 1930s, it was used to clad factories, ice rinks, cinema auditoria, ballrooms and pretty much the entirety of the 1938 Empire Exhibition. No doubt it allowed projects to be achieved that would otherwise have been deemed too expensive – but at great health cost to those involved in making and installing the panels.

Perhaps the most style-specific factory-made components of Art Deco and moderne buildings were metal-framed windows with horizontal bars and curving corner units, mostly associated with the Crittall company of Braintree in Essex, but also produced by other manufacturers. During the 1930s, these became an almost indispensable feature of edifices of many types and their specification could lend a property a hint of the moderne look without need for much further effort.

The use of bright, coordinated colours is a characteristic of the Art Deco and moderne styles internationally – though in Scotland this was usually most evident in interiors. Legacies of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century decorative arts styles, plus the discovery of the polychromatic treasures on Tutankhamun's tomb, gave architects, designers and decorators much to emulate. The boldest designs by leading French decorators shown at the Paris Exposition were distinguished by strong contrasts, for example the juxtaposition of black and saturated red with soft pastel tones. Gilded enrichment was passé, with silver – the colour of the future – preferred for embellishment. Such palettes were considered daring and sophisticated and were replicated in Britain in exclusive Mayfair hotel and apartment interiors – spaces occupied by relatively small, exceedingly wealthy and cosmopolitan elites. By contrast, those designing mainstream commercial venues aiming to attract popular audiences usually sought to achieve a welcoming sense of warmth and so orange, apricot, tan and gold tones were more likely to be used. More often than is perhaps imagined looking back, British Art Deco and moderne commercial interiors also often featured dark shades of green, mustard and especially chocolate brown, which while relatively effective at concealing dirt were neither uplifting nor distinctly up-to-date looking.

A Scottish Art Deco?

Art Deco in Scotland raises issues and themes concerning Scotland's architecture, design and manufacturing roles within Britain as a whole and within the British Empire, as well as its relationships with continental Europe and the USA. There was a long-standing French influence upon Scottish culture and since the eighteenth-century merchants in Glasgow had developed close business ties with America. In the interwar period, as we have already seen, the impacts and effects of American popular culture came to be increasingly keenly felt in Scotland. The large Scottish diaspora, scattered across the Empire, included architects who migrated during the Great Depression, seeking better employment opportunities than at home. Art Deco in Scotland resulted from Scottish architects and designers discovering and adopting European and American practices.

With regard to the initial rise of Art Deco and moderne in the interwar era, the most important centre was of course Paris, followed later on by New York and with London as the first significant British location where the smart set sought to emulate the latest in continental style. In such a context, Scotland arguably represented a series of increasingly remote peripheries. The Canadian geographer and sociologist Rob Shields has shown how modern conditions have a hierarchical

spatiality. In *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity*, he observes that 'marginal status may come from out-of-the-way geographical locations… being the Other pole to a great cultural centre. In all cases … geographic marginality… is a mark of being… placed on the periphery of cultural systems of space in which places are ranked relative to each other'.[39] In the British national consciousness, the northern conurbations were framed primarily as sites of engineering and manufacture. This was particularly true of how Glasgow was represented, the large passenger ships built by Clyde shipyards being world-famous symbols of Scottish pre-eminence in engineering and skilled making on a very large scale. The farming hinterlands with their villages and market towns as well as the Highlands and islands, were seen as further removed and increasingly remote Scottish peripheries to be made desirable through promotion for tourist visitors – yet, in all these diverse contexts, examples of the Art Deco and moderne styles appeared. There were, of course, very lengthy physical, economic, cultural and perceptual distances between Paris, London, Glasgow and such small and far-flung communities. The ways in which the style manifested and was experienced in these locations were commensurately different too.

The idea of there possibly being a distinctly Scottish Art Deco implies that there were particular approaches north of the border that were recognisably different from those to the south and, that to achieve such a unique design culture would have required separate design educational traditions, trajectories of practice and professional infrastructures. In architecture, a prime discipline through which Art Deco was manifested in Scotland, these prerequisites were well established. The Scottish profession has its own organisation, separate from the Royal Institute of British Architects in London (RIBA), though with much cross-fertilisation of members and thinking between the two. The Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland (RIAS) can trace its origins back to 1840 in Edinburgh but became a national body in 1916 through the diplomacy of the distinguished Edinburgh-based architect Robert Rowand Anderson (1834–1921). Towards the end of his life he encouraged a merger of the Edinburgh Architectural Association and the Glasgow Institute of Architects to form the RIAS and donated his home to house its headquarters; it first gained its Royal Charter in 1922.[40] Scottish architecture and building had over time absorbed various continental influences, and more recently colonial and American ones were integrated too. In the interwar era, the new RIAS and its *Quarterly Illustrated* journal provided channels for vigorous debates with regard to how modern Scottish architecture and urban planning should proceed. Irrespective of style, Scottish stone and harling lent many buildings a distinctly local character while, for some observers, modern asymmetrical architectural composition apparently could be interpreted as being a continuation of the Scots vernacular, shorn of period details. This was, however, a tenuous line of argument which possibly illustrated above all that one could see in modernism whatever one chose to see.[41] With regard to architectural embellishment, the revival of Celtic symbolism, which had gathered momentum since the latter nineteenth century as part of a wider European national romanticism, was occasionally reflected in sculpture, decorative glasswork and murals. Yet, in most instances, Art Deco in Scotland involved transposing, without much modification, forms, typologies and details originating in the sunny south or in the USA or both. There was often a striking disjunction between boldly novel insertions into the Scottish public realm, such as flat-roofed villas with extruded balconies, outdoor lidos with floodlighting, and cinemas with Hollywood-style signage, and their often couthy and sometimes dreich surroundings. What there was not in any significant amount in Scotland was the highly ornamental Art Deco found in France and the Americas. This lack in part reflected a desire among progressive Scottish practitioners to be aligned with reputable opinion about 'good' design exhibiting restraint, but it was also a reflection of economic necessity.

If architecture represented the respectable end of the Scottish creative spectrum, commercial art, another area where distinctly Scottish approaches may be identified, generally reflected modern taste in populist form. Poster advertising and product packaging directly addressed the consumer and, in many instances, up-to-date fonts, images and references were fused with ones that evoked nostalgia for much older Scottish traditions. Scotland already had its own abstract, geometric, boldly coloured national pattern in the form of tartan, which – contrary to what one might suppose – actually lent itself rather well to modern graphic, fashion and interior contexts. This was widely employed in travel and tourist imagery, as well as for the packaging of Scottish-made food and drink, among

a wide variety of other situations. More prosaically, at the demotic extreme, what might be termed 'Scotchity' – naively romantic or downright banal Scottish imagery – was endemic in the interwar era: even the slickly futuristic Glasgow Empire Exhibition of 1938 included a Highland Clachan, a recreation of a small village which proved to be among its most popular exhibits.

Art Deco and moderne objects, edifices and images were inserted into a Scottish urban scene very different from that of the present day. Scotland was a coal economy and it was from the coalfields of Fife, the Lothians, Lanarkshire and Ayrshire that modest six-coupled steam locomotives of late-Victorian era design hauled unfitted trains of wagons to the towns and cities, where the coal was used for heating, industry and transport. Practically every room in every household had a coal fire and the belching chimneys of factories ensured that air in industrial areas was usually filthy with sooty smoke and, in autumn and winter, thick smogs enveloped the cities. The porous sandstone from which most of central Scotland's buildings were constructed was consequentially uniformly black with absorbed pollution. People smoked everywhere – at home, at work, on transport, in cafes, bars and restaurants and even at their seats in the cinema. Clothing became saturated in smoke from coal and tobacco alike and so, for housewives, doing the washing was a constant burden.

The Scots in the interwar years – and the British as a whole – were far more insular than they have since become. The social classes were more stratified with manual workers and their dependants forming a large majority of the population of the Central Belt. For men, the type of hat worn signified one's position in the hierarchy; 'bunnets' for the blue-collar labouring masses and bowlers for those of managerial rank. The rural lives of the substantial but widely spread farming communities were often separate again, though the rural and industrial mixed on the expanding urban fringes and in mining districts. The Scottish aristocracy led existences that were also distinct, though many were involved in farming through land ownership, or in industry as company directors and investors, so they, like most others, were buffeted by the era's strong economic, cultural and social winds of change. Only the wealthy could afford cars and so public transport was the main means of getting about. Scotland was largely ethnically homogeneous too, though urban communities tended to be either overwhelmingly Protestant or Roman Catholic. Although mass-immigration was yet to begin, in port cities, the Indian seafarers who formed the crews of many British ships were part of the urban scene as they took brief shore-leave from their vessels. Scottish universities also taught relatively small numbers of students from all over the British Empire. The radio (or 'the wireless', as most would have referred to it) was a prime source of information and stimulation and a much greater variety of newspapers were read than today, while the cinema, following the invention of films with soundtracks in the late 1920s, soon gained crucial importance as a source of both news and entertainment.[42]

Glasgow, in particular, was far busier and much more densely populated than today, having approximately double the current population with very large numbers packed into inner city areas peripheral to the central business district. One did not have to walk far from the main city centre shopping streets with their grand department stores to encounter pockets of grinding poverty with slum housing and dishevelled children playing in the streets. Some city traffic remained horse-drawn, horse droppings lying on the granite sets and tramlines. There was little by way of litter, though – but that was because most food was unpackaged and had to be consumed either on the premises where it was purchased, or at home.

The after-effects of childhood malnutrition in the impoverished areas manifested in adults with bone-deformity. During the First World War, the poor physical condition of young men of fighting age became a political matter and across Europe regimes both moderate and radical encouraged investment in new sports and health facilities and, as we shall see, Scottish examples were often fine instances of moderne. Images in the popular press of film stars and the rich and famous enjoying riviera beaches, meanwhile, encouraged a growing popular interest in beautiful bodies. While this was mostly positive, there was also a darker aspect in the parallel growing fascination for the possibilities of eugenics.[43]

For those able to afford to escape, the great interwar expansion of suburbia offered a different way of living amid relatively clean air and green space. Municipal and private developers alike took degrees of inspiration

from the pre-war Garden City concepts of Ebenezer Howard (1850–1928) to expand conurbations into the adjacent countryside. However, as suburbia grew, increasing numbers within the architectural profession tended towards agreement with the Welsh-born architectural romantic Clough Williams-Ellis (1883–1978) that an untamed 'octopus' of new arterial roads and urban sprawl was threatening to destroy the countryside. Others, meanwhile, were merely delighted by the amount of new building work this expansion was generating.[44] In the suburbs, light manufacturing provided new employment possibilities and transport was largely dependent on internal combustion engines.

Looking back, part of the fascination of the interwar period derives from its financial and political turbulence, involving great economic swings and radical politics with the rise of communism at one extreme and of fascism at the other. The effects of the post-war Treaty of Versailles of 1918, the stringent terms of which the victorious allies imposed upon a reluctant Germany, were to emasculate the economy of what, pre-war, had been continental Europe's pre-eminent industrial nation – but the consequent negative effects on international trade, coupled with Germany's size and central geographical position, caused stagnation across much of the continent. Scotland had in any case lost between 100,000 and 135,000 young men in the war and a far greater number were badly injured physically and mentally.[45] Had they not been cut down in their prime, many would no doubt have gone on to become the inventors, entrepreneurs, managers and skilled workers who would have refreshed Scottish culture, economy and public life, but instead it was an older generation who often perpetuated established ways of doing things while new developments happened elsewhere.

For those who did return from the war, there was anger about rising unemployment and a shortened working week, which led the Trades Union Congress in Glasgow to call a strike in January 1919 with a mass protest in the city's George Square. Fearing a Bolshevist uprising, the Sheriff of Lanarkshire requested military assistance – but it was the Glasgow police who baton-charged the protesters, dispersing them.[46] In the 1922 general election, Scotland returned 29 Labour MPs, signalling a growing adherence to socialism, particularly in the Central Belt. The 1919 strike was the first of a succession of sometimes prolonged and acrimonious disputes to affect central Scotland's industrial base and mining industry in the 1920s, culminating in the nation-wide General Strike of May 1926.[47] In America, meanwhile, fear that dissatisfied German workers might take inspiration from the Russian Revolution of 1917 led the US government to appoint the politician Charles Dawes to devise an economic aid plan, involving loans of $200 million to boost the German economy.[48] The Dawes Plan succeeded as intended and the epithet of 'the roaring twenties' may be thought of as referring to the economic boom that it helped achieve in the decade's second half.

The Wall Street Crash of 1929 and the Great Depression that followed particularly badly affected Scotland's manufacturing economy, as the kinds of large, capital-intensive, heavily engineered outputs it produced were among the first to cease to be ordered when the sharp downturn began and the last for which new orders were placed when confidence returned. Indeed, for the established industries, the decade from 1929 until 1939 was exceptionally challenging and it was their manual workers who suffered most. By contrast, there was some industrial expansion with the development of new, light industries, powered by electricity and making consumer goods, cosmetics and foodstuffs. Their growth in Scotland was less than in central and southern England, however. Service industries also expanded and the rising wages of the administrative class, combined with overall price deflation, gave them extra disposable income.[49]

Disenchantment with the political status quo led initially small numbers of Scots to believe that greater – or complete – national autonomy was in their interest. The National Party of Scotland, established in 1928 through a merger of three existing very small nationalist parties, favoured home rule, while the more moderate Scottish Party, founded in 1932, initially called for Scotland to have Dominion status, akin to Canada. The two merged in 1934 to form the Scottish Nationalist Party, but it remained for the time being a minor political force. The aim of Scotland running more of its own affairs and cultivating a distinct identity as a British nation, however, gained a growing following with tacit support from across the political

spectrum and this contributed to the case for the strengthening of the Scottish Office as a department of the British government.[50] The consequently expanded bureaucracy would need a new headquarters in Edinburgh, providing an architectural opportunity to reflect a modern Scottish identity.

The Great Depression had mostly negative consequences both for the architectural profession and for the construction industry, in both of which work became suddenly scarce. There were a few years of recovery between the mid-1930s and 1939, the peak year for building being 1937, after which political instability in Europe meant that finance for new projects became harder to obtain. Towards the end of the decade, the rearmament programme made inroads into steel supplies, meaning that its price rose and less was available. Britain's declaration of war on 3 September 1939 brought an abrupt end to all new non-essential building while permission needed to be sought for the completion of projects already under way.[51] It was not until the 1950s that new construction projects began once more on an appreciable scale.